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THE PEDLAR AND HIS DOG

*THE
PEDLAR
AND HIS
DOG*

*By
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*BLACKIE & SON LTD.
London Glasgow Bombay*

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STORIES OLD AND NEW

A small chosen library is like a walled garden where a child may safely play. In that charmed seclusion the love of books, like the love of flowers, grows of itself. If the reading habit is to be acquired, the child ought from the first to be given real books, which may be handled with pleasure and kept with pride—books containing literature suited to its own age.

This volume belongs to a series of "Stories Old and New" which has been prepared specially for children. The books have been carefully chosen so as to include, along with many charming stories by the best children's authors of to-day, a due proportion of those older tales which never grow old.

To secure simplicity and right gradation, the text has been prepared to suit the different ages of readers. Care has been given to the illustration, print, and binding of the series, for it is believed that this is the best way to secure from the children that careful handling of the volumes which is the mark of the true book-lover.

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THE PEDLAR AND HIS DOG

CHAPTER I

NECTON FAIR

It was Whitsuntide, and Necton Fair, and such a fair all old England besides did not know the like of. To begin with, never was such a May-pole to be seen, as that which stood in the fair field, decorated to the very top, which seemed to touch the sky, with cowslip garlands, and many-coloured ribbons streaming in the soft May breeze. Then there were the toy and gilt ginger-bread stalls, and the booths, and peep-shows, and swings, and hobby-horse merry-go-rounds, and the mountebanks and tumblers, and tight-rope dancing, and Master Jack Puddings in their scarlet-and-yellow jackets; and jumping in sacks, and quoit-throwing, and

tennis, and wrestling matches, and the rest of it. If folks for twenty miles round, did not meet at any other time all the year round, they were sure to meet at Necton Fair. But everything must have an end. The fair lasted only two days; and this was the second day, and the fun of it was nearly over. The great golden evening sun was fast sinking behind the low distant westward hills, and flung his dazzling beams into the eyes of a man who was slowly tramping along over the furzy common, with a large pack on his back and a dog at his heels, towards the market town of Swaffham, whose red-peaked housetops and tall church tower lay quite close to look at, but in reality were still nearly a mile ahead, for, as yet, the wayfarers had not reached Pimpernel Pond, and that was a goodish step from Swaffham.

The man, who was of middle height, sturdy of build, and broad-shouldered, was dressed in a short brown coat, or jerkin as it was called, dark-blue loose trunks, leathern gaiters, stout laced-up shoes, and a furry cap which covered his head and came down rather low over the ears and face, though not enough to hide the broad, deep-lined forehead, keen dark

eyes, and shrewd and weather-beaten but kindly features. A wallet hung at his side, and the pack on his back, which was covered with a tarred canvas wrapper fastened round his neck by a stout leathern strap, and showed that he was a pedlar by calling, seemed to be rather a heavy load, for he bent under it a little as he went, and leaned heavily with both hands on the long sturdy elm staff he carried.

As to "Shock", his dog, who trotted beside him, he was just an everyday-looking, homely sort of dog, not longer out of his puppyhood than it had taken time to make him as big as ever he was likely to be. His coat was of much the same colour as his master's, but it was a good deal patched with white—and still rougher and shaggier. His nose was an intelligent and busy-looking one, and as black as a bit of coal. His tail was an excellent tail, as far as it went, which was as near as possible four inches, and wig-wagged in a moment at the least kind word or glance you spared him. His eyes made his most noticeable feature, however. They were of the honest, beautiful, brown, clear sort dogs do generally have, and Shock had them particularly, or so his master

thought. What breed he was of, it is more difficult to tell; and so we will speak of his manners, which is far more important, since they make the dog every bit as much as they do the man. Shock's were simply perfect. The lordliest deerhound of a castle was not more of a gentleman, in his way, than was Shock, John Pennycuick, the pedlar's dog, in his.

He may have had his faults, just as the castle dog would have, and sometimes broken the bounds a little, as, for example, when he fought old Dame Honeywort's big young cock, and sent him sulky and crestfallen to his perch. But then the bird had been uncommonly pert to begin with, picking and pecking at Shock's shaggy ears as he trotted along on business calling him to the other end of the street. Take him for all in all, you would not meet his better from Land's End to John o' Groats. He was dauntless in battle, never known to turn tail, provided the enemy was of his own size, or bigger—the small yelpers he never seemed so much as to see—gentle and kind by hearthstone,—a fierce foe perhaps, but a faithful friend most surely. In short, Shock

was every inch a dog. Daily through all the time he had lived since he had left his mother's basket, in fair weather and foul, he had gone with his master on his rounds, first of all as a little roly-poly of a puppy, and then, when he grew older, on foot, until the sight of John Pennycuick the pedlar and his dog, was one as well known, all round twenty miles of Swaffham, as the sunrise or the shining of the stars.

As to John Pennycuick's pack, no wonder it was heavy, for what did it not contain? Trinkets of all kinds; amber necklaces, horn rings, shoe-ties, laces, gloves, pins, pomander balls, ribbons, tapes, and even large pieces of stuffs, and lawn; everything, in short, that anybody could possibly want or wish for; and these two last days John, having paid his standing in the fair, had done a good business, all things considered, and was plodding home, tired out.

Shock too walked wearily. Truth to tell, he did not like fairs very much. They were too noisy and crowded for his taste, which inclined far more to breezy green fields and woodland paths, where you might roll in the fresh sweet-smelling grass, or scuffle in and

out of hedgerows after the stoats and weasels. Many times more than once these last two days, his toes had been trodden on, through no fault whatever of his own, by the great hob-nailed shoes of the clod-hopping bumpkins, whose gaze was all fixed on the painted booth-cloths, and then, because he barked, he was bidden get out for a clumsy brute. Then the drumming and fifing, and yelling and bawling, so that one could scarcely hear one's self bark, was nothing like so musical in his ears as the trilling of the birds, and the lowing of the cattle, and the chiming of the church belfries, as he and John Pennycuick trudged along on their ordinary rounds. John himself was quite of his companion's opinion, and it was not out of any regret for the fair being over, that either lagged along the dusty road, but because their feet so ached with standing that they could not get along any faster; while poor Shock's tongue hung dry and parched from his open jaws with thirst; for there had been more ale going than water at the fair, and certainly not a drop of water to be found where a poor dog could get at it.

Suddenly, as they trudged on, Shock came

to a complete standstill, cocked his ears quite briskly, lifted his nose high in the air, and sniffed hard. Then he was off, and next moment all to be seen of him was the tip of his tail and the heels of his hind legs as he disappeared with a flying leap down somewhere among a clump of furze bushes.

The pedlar smiled quietly. He knew well enough what Shock was after. The dog had scented the cool clear water of Pimpernel Pond, and by this time was getting a good drink at it, and John quickened his pace a little. Long, however, before he had reached the pond, a great hubbub broke the evening stillness—made up of a sharp yelp of pain, a screech of mocking laughter, and a chorus of young voices to increase the noise. In the midst of it all came Shock, limping back out of the bushes as fast as three legs would let him; for his left paw dangled helpless and bleeding, and with an appealing look up at his master he fell at his feet.

Hurriedly removing his pack from his shoulders, and setting it on the ground, John bent down over the poor animal to examine the hurt; but scarcely had he done so than a

scuffling, rushing noise made him lift his head, and he beheld a little crowd of lads pressing round after two in their midst, one of whom had the undermost pinned fast to the ground with one hand, while with the other he was giving to his fallen foe a good round pommeling.

Like the companions of the two fighters, the pedlar stood gazing in open-mouthed amazement at this strange scene. "Come, young master, hands off there!" he cried, when at last he found breath to speak.

The victor paused, one hand still pinning the boy to the ground, where he lay prone, his big, purple, red cheeks puffing like a stranded porpoise, the other poised in mid-air, and white and slender as a girl's it looked for all its strength. Then turning a fair delicate face, and fixing on John Pennycuick a pair of brilliant bluish-grey eyes for a moment, he glanced down once more at his conquered enemy.

"What's it all about?" demanded John.

"He flung a stone at the dog while he was drinking out of the pond," cried the lads in a breath. "And Coke's giving him a drubbing for it," added one.

"He's hurt, isn't he?" said the conqueror, loosening his grip at last from the coward's throat; and, bestowing on him a parting kick, he turned, and approaching the wounded dog, knelt down beside him and gently stroked the poor animal's head, while he looked pityingly at his paw, which was now bleeding.

"Is he your dog?" he asked the pedlar in a voice which was almost drowned in the shouts of laughter greeting the beaten enemy, who had risen with no small difficulty to his feet, and was now slinking away in sulky silence through the brambles, letting another sharp flint stone, which his fingers still clutched, drop from between them as he went.

"Ay, he's my dog," answered the pedlar, in tones trembling with mingled grief and anger, as he carefully took the injured paw in his hand and examined it closely; "and the bone's broken here, just by the lower joint. Bring me a drop of water, will you, young master," he added; "and if you're as kind as you seem, you'll give me that stout twig lying under the bush yonder."

The boy did as he was desired, dipping out the water with his cap, which was the only

way he could think of; and then he came and quietly stood by, watching the pedlar wash the grit and dust from the wound.

“Stop a bit,” he said, when John drew a coarse cotton handkerchief from his pocket, and was about to tear it into strips for a bandage; “this will be softer;” and as he spoke he undid the white lawn ruff he wore round his throat, and smoothing it out of the plaits, handed it to the pedlar, to bind round the broken leg.

All this time, Shock lay patient and quiet, with only the mute, mournful look in his eyes, to tell of the pain he was suffering.

CHAPTER II

SHOCK LAMED

“THERE’s one thing clear,” said the pedlar, when at last the work was finished, and he began to shoulder his pack again. “He can’t walk home. Will you do one more kind act for the poor beast, young sir, and lift him into my arms here?”

"No," said the boy, eyeing the heavy pack; "I'll carry him myself, if I may. Will he let me?"

"I'll warrant he will," thankfully answered John. "He's a rare one, is Shock, for knowing who's good to him; and who's brutal for that matter," he muttered in a lower tone, as he cast a glance across the common towards the lessening figure of the lad who had injured Shock, followed at a safe distance by the rest of the lads, and then stood and watched the young stranger, while he carefully and tenderly took up the wounded dog, and managed cleverly to lay the bandaged limb, so that it could not be jolted.

"There, poor old man," he said, "I'll not hurt you more than I can help. Which way were you bound for?" he added to the pedlar.

"Swaffham," answered John.

"All right!" said the lad, facing about.

"But you were going to the fair?" said John, fancying he heard the faintest echo of a sigh.

"I was; but I'm not now," replied the boy, putting his best foot foremost towards the town.

"I don't know how to thank you, young master," said the pedlar when they had gone a

little way in silence, "for all your kindness to my dog."

"I don't want any thanks," answered the boy; "I liked it."

"Well now," said John, taking a good look at the slender but well-knit figure of the lad, and the thoughtful, delicate features, flushed now with his efforts, "I shouldn't have supposed you to be a fighter."

"I don't know whether I am a fighter or not," said the boy; "but I know I was glad of my chance of giving that cowardly sneak of a Tom Badsworth something for his pains. He's always up to his tricks."

"A bully, eh?"

"The biggest in the school."

"What school?"

"Norwich Grammar School. And when he can't find mischief for his hands to do, he sets his tongue to work. You never can believe a word he says. And he calls that fun."

"I expect he doesn't get such a drubbing every day of the week, as you gave him just now," said John.

"It isn't because he doesn't deserve it then," answered Coke, a smile of satisfaction curling

his kindly lips. "But some of our fellows are not up to tackling Badsworth. He's as strong as a carthorse."

"And you?" said the pedlar; "why, he's as broad again as you are."

"Oh, but I'm stronger than perhaps I look! And then I'm taller. Every bit of half an inch."

"Ah! that makes it straight of course," said the pedlar, very gravely; "and how many years older?"

"There it is again. I turned fourteen last first of February, and Badsworth wasn't fourteen till the middle of March."

"Marry! a whole six weeks!" said the pedlar. "And if I may make so bold," he added a little shyly, "as to ask the name of one who has done a poor man's dog such a good turn?"

"My name's Coke. Edward Coke," answered the boy.

"Coke of Mileham," said the pedlar, not without awe in his tones.

"Of Mileham Hall, yes," nodded the lad. "Do you know it?"

"Ay, right well do I. Don't I take it in my Friday's round every week of the year's

fifty-two? And don't I take many a shilling, too, from your people for my ballads and shoe-laces, and what not? But it's a goodish step from here to Mileham at this hour, for the likes of you," he added.

"Oh, don't mind about that," answered the boy; "my mother won't be anxious. She knows I was bound for the fair; and won't be expecting me home this hour or two. Here we are," he went on, as they arrived at the meeting of four cross-roads, two of which slanted off right and left into the town; "which way?"

"Up to the right here," answered the pedlar; "the third house, if so be you'll honour it with the light of your kind face, Master Coke."

And a funny little house it was, with its deep thatch, in which was one tiny window, and its plaster walls scored with zigzags and flowers, and criss-crossed with timber, and the stout little iron-clamped wooden door; while another window, not more than two feet from the ground, and whose latticed panes jutted a good way out over the cobble-stones of the street, occupied pretty well all the rest of the lower half of the house front. Over this window was painted in good-sized letters:—

JOHN PENNYCUICK,

*BOOTS AND SHOES REPAIRED ON THE
SHORTEST NOTICE.*

"I thought you were a pedlar," said the boy, as he read the words, and then watched John unlock the door with the huge key he had taken from his pocket.

"So I am," replied John, pushing the door wide open, and motioning his companion to enter; "and if you come to that, I'm Jack of all trades, when I can get the trade to do. I'm fair and handy with my fingers, and times aren't so piping as to be able to sit and twiddle your thumbs; and when the neighbours bring me their old shoes to patch, I patch them."

"Well, and it is all of a piece, isn't it?" laughed Coke.

John stared in grave inquiry.

"Why, *pedlar* and *pedes*, don't you know?"

But John shook his head.

"You know why you're called a pedlar, don't you?"

"Never could make it out," said John. "It has always seemed to me the queerest word I ever heard in all my born days."

“Well,” said Coke, “it’s a derivative, you know.”

“Oh, is it now?” said John, his countenance getting, if anything, a shade foggier. “Now what may that be?”

“Why, it’s like this. *Pedes* is the Latin for feet. And you travel afoot.”

“Ay, that I do,” said John, as he set his best and worst chair for his visitor, and seated himself on his cobbler’s three-legged stool. “Won’t you sit down and rest your *pedes* a bit?”

“And you also mend what covers feet,” went on Coke, doing as he was invited, with Shock still in his arms.

“Think of that now!” said the pedlar, gazing in wonder and admiration at Coke’s bright young face. “That all comes of being a scholar. You’ll be a great man one of these days, young gentleman.”

“I mean to try for it,” said Coke.

“And a good one too, I’ll warrant,” went on Pennycuick, as he rose; and bringing some fresh hay from a shed just outside the garden door, he spread it softly and smoothly in an old disused pack-case, and carefully sliding

Shock from the boy's arms into his own, he laid him in it. "A good one too, I'll go bail."

"I hope so," said Coke, watching the proceedings.

"And a just one."

"That's more difficult," said the boy thoughtfully.

"Difficult!" cried the pedlar; "why, black and white are not easier to tell than right from wrong! You didn't find it difficult just now, when you dealt justice to that loon's head, for his cruel trick on my poor Shock here."

"Oh, well, you know," laughed the boy; "that was a bit of *forest* law. Wasn't it?"

"And the only law too, for such vermin. Heaven bless you for it!"

"Well, I must be going now," said the boy, bending down and bestowing a parting caress on Shock, who licked his hand as he lay quiet and comfortable in his bed. "Good-night, old dog! May I come to-morrow and see how he's getting on?" he asked.

"Ay, may you, and heartily welcome you'll be. And the day after too, and whenever you will."

"When I can, I'm afraid that'll have to be,"

said Coke. "School begins again Thursday morning."

"And you're no ten-o'clock scholar, I'll warrant. Well, God be with you, and good-night, young master, since you'll not stay for bit or sup! Good-night and fair dreams!"

"The same to you," said Coke, as he stepped out into the starlit twilight, and put his best foot foremost for Mileham.

When at last he reached the Hall, he had his supper and went to bed, for it was terribly late for those good old times, and he was tired out. Too tired for good sound sleep, and he dreamed all sorts of the oddest dreams; though all he could remember out of the jumble next morning was, that he thought he was sitting upon a sort of throne, amidst a vast sea of upturned faces; and then, all at once, the throne, which had seemed firm enough, began to shake and topple, and before he could get down, away he went headlong, and he thought he must have been killed, for he kept falling down, down, down—but before he got to the bottom he woke.

It was, to be sure, an odd mixture of pleasant and disagreeable; but then, was it not Whit-

suntide, and would not any old Mileham gaffer or gammer tell you, that Whitsuntide was one of the wonderfulest times in the year for dreams? and they were all sure to come true. And meanwhile, John had a dream, which he considered most marvellous indeed, and in fact—but John's dream must wait, for it was far too strange anyway, to make the fag-end of a chapter.

CHAPTER III

JOHN PENNYCUICK'S DREAM

A BUSY little town was Swaffham, more so on market days, when all the good wives of the neighbourhood brought their butter and eggs there to sell; though it had been busier still in the old times, when the great castle was inhabited; but Castle Acre was only a ruin now.

It stood on a high grassy mound nearly four miles from the town, overlooking the banks of the river Nar, and the grey walls of the priory which Earl de Warrenne, the first lord of the castle, had built, nestling in a green valley a little way along the river's opposite banks.

The road between Swaffham and the castle had once also been a very lively and bustling one, because here had lived the armourers and other traders who had worked for the Earls de Warrenne; and there had been much coming and going between the town and the village at the castle foot. All that was, however, quite different now; the last Earl had long been dead, and his fine castle and the priory were only ivy-clad ruins, while a tumbledown cottage or two were all that remained of the once thriving village. Nothing either could well be more lonely and dreary than the way thither. After passing a couple of farmhouses lying beyond John Pennycuick's cottage at the top of Swaffham High Street, nothing was to be seen all round but a wide stretch of furzy common, which in winter was so swampy that it was called "Swaffham Splashes". Beyond the splashes, the country was still more barren, being just a waste of chalky ground patched over with coarse, stunted turf. From its midst, however, rose the green grassy mound and outworks crowned by Castle Acre.

John Pennycuick, whose business took him this way every week, had once found it a very

dull and long one; but a dog makes all the difference in the world, and Shock no more knew what dull meant when he was out-of-doors, than he would let his master be dull. Such goings on as he indulged in, once clear out in the open road! Such mad capers as he cut! Such joyous yelps and barks as he kept breaking into! Such careering round and round at wild speed, and tearing after the big black crows and saucy wagtails, who were always off long before he could get near them. Then away he was once more, floundering in and out of the boggy holes till he looked a mere speck in the distance; then back again, almost breathless, but stopping just to bark at the old wagon horses turned out to grass, who would kick up their heels, and whinny and laugh their "He! he! Master Shock, there you are, we know you," and nibble on!

Then all at once he would catch sight of a flock of geese, and lo! instantly he was among them, sending them all trundling and tumbling into the pond, where the foolish birds flattered themselves they were safe, never dreaming that he was a fine swimmer too, and would be flop in after them, sending them all screeching and

gabbling about the pond till his master called him to heel in tones which sounded ever so fierce. Then Shock would come and walk for quite two minutes as soberly as if he had never said "Bo" to a goose in his life, which after all as yet was such a young one, and his heart was as good a one as ever beat in dog's body. And it is no use, you can't put old heads on young shoulders, and if you could you had better not. That is how Shock's friends looked at it; and he had so many, that neither he nor his master were aware that he had any enemies—until last night.

Well, both knew it now. For what can be worse in the way of enemies, than the sort which gives an unoffending creature a blow in the dark as it were, as Tom Badsworth had given Shock? Never had been a worse piece of cruelty. The dog had been attending entirely to his own business, and troubling nobody, Coke had said. Whether Tom Badsworth knew Shock, was a question—the pedlar fancied it possible—but that Shock neither knew Tom Badsworth, nor desired the pleasure of his acquaintance, was certain. "Yonder's something alive! Let's torture it if we can."

That must have been the evil thought in Tom Badsworth's heart, and only too successfully he had carried it out.

And now very sadly that Whitsuntide Wednesday morning, John Pennycuick prepared for his solitary tramp. It must, of course, be days before the broken bone of Shock's leg would mend, and weeks most probably, before he could go scrambling along in the old style, and in the meantime he was suffering all the pain broken bones bring. That was plain to see in his brown eyes, so wistfully following his master about from over the edge of the box.

It is certain that if John Pennycuick had not been a very poor man, he would have stopped at home that day to nurse Shock. His heart yearned to do it; but poor folks dare not indulge themselves so. When sorrow comes to them, even if it be death itself, taking those who are more than all the world to them, they must still toil and toil on, often all the harder; and if they must cry, like their richer neighbours, they must hide their tears as best they can. All John could do was to shake up Shock's bed a bit for him, and put a platter of bread and milk, and a pannikin of fresh water

in a corner of the pack-case, where he could get at it, for he knew the water would be even more welcome than the food, since the pain of the wound fevered all the poor dog's blood and parched his tongue. And then John Penny-cuick stooped down and kissed the grizzled head, and told him he would be home as early as ever he could. Then shouldering his pack, he lifted the latch, and leaving the door just ajar, for he was not afraid of anybody coming into his poor premises, he set out for Castle Acre with a heavy heart.

The bad trade he drove by no means helped to lighten it. For all the money he earned that morning, he might just as well have been at home nursing Shock. The people, apparently, had spent all they had to spare at Necton Fair; and more besides, to judge from their down-in-the-mouth looks; and what with their empty pockets and aching heads, so many of which, somehow, the fair seemed to have given, there was a vast deal of what their neighbours across the sea call "cat's dol-drums" about.

"'Tis the day after the fair, and no mistake!" sighed the pedlar to himself with a rueful smile,

as he unfastened the strap of his pack, and shifted the load on to the parapet of the old stone bridge, after vainly displaying its contents at the Castle Acre cottage doors.

Taking from his wallet a piece of rye bread and curd cheese, which he had brought with him for his dinner, he began to eat it; and while he ate, he surveyed the scene around him, and looked down into the clear depths of the river beneath, in which the fish were darting merrily and swift as silvery arrows, while the water-flies skimmed its shining surface. Then he gazed upward into the still brighter and bluer sky, and watched a soaring lark, higher and higher, trilling all the way he went; and so his eyes travelled round towards the distant hills, and the green low-lying meadows sloping down to the valley, where the flinty walls of the old priory shadowed down into the water. He thought, as he munched on at his bread, that those old black-gowned monks could have had no bad time of it in the beautiful place, looking after the sick, and teaching the village lads, and helping the poor; and although he soon reminded himself that everybody said all these things were very much better managed now on

the new plans, and what everybody said must be true, still he found it difficult not to feel sorry that the old fellows were all gone. It would have been pleasant, for example, John thought, if he could have stepped down yonder to the buttery-hatch door, and claimed his dole of bread and meat, and the drink of brown ale, which, he had heard say, was refused to none who asked for it. All one would get by going there now would be a rude stare from the surly owls, and perhaps a sting from the wretched little vipers, which, it was said, bred plentifully among the rank bracken and rotting leaves, which fell from the trees and were left uncleared year after year.

As it was, however, the pedlar contented himself with a draught of water, which he dipped up with his little tin mug out of the river, to wash down the rye bread. Being blessed with an excellent appetite, he enjoyed his dinner very much, despite his troubles; and after a little while he took up his pack again, and trudged on towards Tittleshall and East Dering, by way of Mileham, thinking a hundred times in an hour of Shock, and wondering whether he too had been able to eat his dinner.

Almost as often, his thoughts would fly back to that odd dream he had dreamed last night, or more correctly speaking, this morning; for when he awoke from it, he had seen the white dawn stealing in through the tiny casement in the thatch, and that made just the most amusing part of it, for how many a time had he heard his grandmother say—rest her soul! she had been sleeping in Swaffham churchyard many a year—that morning dreams come true. This was such a very strange dream, so meaningless, almost stupid when you came to think of it and turn it well over in clear, broad, sensible daylight. He had had a great muddle of dreaming first, of which he could recall next to nothing, but that Shock and his hurt leg, and the swings, and merry-go-rounds, and the pig-headed lady, and Queen Elizabeth, and ever so much besides, were mixed up. Then, all at once, out of the buzz and rush, like the sound of falling waters, clear as ever he had heard waking words, he heard a voice which called him three times by his name. Then he beheld a figure enveloped from head to foot in long sweeping garments, and he found that it was the figure which spoke, and went on to tell him

that if he travelled up to London, and stood on London Bridge, he should hear very joyful news.

What could the pedlar do but laugh at that? for what was London to him, or he to London, that he should go and do such a thing? He had, of course, heard any number of mighty fine tales about London town, and all the wonders to be seen there, and true they might be, or false—as like enough was the case, for travellers spin such yarns—but he knew for a certainty that London streets were not paved with gold, as some mischief-loving varlet had told Dick Whittington they were. Dick Whittington! Well, he was a lad, and lads are all for adventure, and altogether, considering he was such a credulous harum-scarum, he had not come so badly off; but John was a sober-minded, middle-aged man, whose years more than trebled Master Dick's, and he had no cat to make his fortune with; though, to be sure, he had a dog, and a clever dog he was too, poor old fellow; and then John smiled to himself. Why, he trudging along, in his skin cap, staff in hand, and pack on back, with old Shock beside him, would make almost as good a

picture as famous Dick. "Whyttington and hys Catte." "Ye Pedlar and hys Dogge." That sounded every bit as well; and then John's smiles, in spite of his troubles, grew into a laugh at the queer notion. A notion, however, it was likely to remain, for he was not going to be deceived, or put out of his steady jog-trot ways for any foolish dream's sake. Not he! And then John Pennycuick shook his head and chuckled again and again as he jogged on, quickening his pace a bit as the sundial on Tittleshall village green showed time was getting on.

CHAPTER IV

THE COVETED ACRE

SUDDENLY, as he reached the end of the tall hawthorn hedge, bordering the lane which ran along by the glebe field that was traversed by a path leading to the churchyard gate, who should come twisting round by the turnstile but Edward Coke. At sight of his new acquaintance, a pleased smile lit up the lad's face. "And how is Shock?" were his first words, as

he shut the open book in his hands, and tucking it under one arm, turned and walked along beside the pedlar.

"Doing quite bravely, I hope. Thanks to you, young master," answered John.

"Well, I was pretty sure of that," said Coke; "else I expect you would hardly have laughed quite so loudly."

"Laugh; did you hear me?"

"Rather."

"Laughing's not always the sign of a light heart all the same, mind you," sighed John.

"But you laughed so loudly and heartily," said Coke, "one could have heard you from here to Mileham. What's the joke, eh?"

"Well," and again John's face began to broaden. "It's enough to make a cat laugh, or even my sober old Shock."

"And a secret perhaps, only to be told to him," said Coke, thinking he should dearly like to know, but not wishing to be troublesome.

"Oh, for all the secret it is, you're as welcome to it as flowers in May; and to tell it again if you're minded."

Then the pedlar related his dream to Coke.

"You don't seem over and above amused by it," he said, in rather disappointed tones when he had finished, and saw quite a grave, thoughtful look had settled on the boy's face. "I don't believe you've been listening."

"Ay, but I have."

"You don't laugh," said John.

"I! oh—ha! ha! Yes, it's very funny. Oh yes, curious, I mean, don't you know!"

"Not a bit of it," said John. "It was the most natural thing in the world, after all, when you come to think of it; because there have I been two days at the fair, and yesterday, before I came away, I thought, 'I'll treat myself to one taste of the fun of it,' for all work and no play, you know, young master, makes Jack a dull boy. And so, after I had thought well over which pennyworth I would have of it all, I settled on the big peepshow. I saw the mermaid, you know, Master Coke, last year, and the fat woman the year before, and the learned pig the year before that; and I wanted a bit of sense this time, and so, 'Turn the handle, friend,' I said when I had paid my way, and looked in at the little glass, and saw only the Queen of Sheba and Solomon in all his glory.

‘They’re as old as the hills.’ So he turns it, and there, so please you, was my Lord Mayor, Sir Richard Whittington, in his state coach, going in procession to Westminster Hall. ‘Turn again, turn again, my good fellow!’ cried I, for ’twas but little fresher to me than the other. ‘You’re main hard to please,’ says my showman, laughing a bit, however, and doing as I bade him. ‘There,’ he cries then, ‘that’s worth all your money alone, anyhow. Say if it isn’t.’ Well, and so it was, Master Coke; for there sat our gracious Queen Elizabeth in her splendid gilded barge, gliding up the Thames past Bankside,—for plain as plain you could see the walls of the Globe Theatre through the trees,—surrounded by all her ladies and courtiers, my Lord of Essex, Sir Walter Raleigh, and the rest; and at her feet sat a kind-faced gentleman dressed much as you are, Master Coke, in black, with a white ruff round his neck, reading out of a big book. ‘Who’s the gentleman sitting on the ground?’ said I. ‘Master William Shakspeare,’ says the showman. ‘Ay, the play-actor! I know,’ said I. ‘And the play-writer too,’ says he. ‘Oh! is he?’ said I. ‘I think I’ve heard before, that

he can hold a pen.' 'When you've had your fill of looking,' says the showman, 'there are others won't be sorry.' 'Eh! all right, friend,' said I; but I thought to myself as I came away, London must be a brave, fine city. Eh, Master Coke?"

"Well, why don't you go up and give yourself a sight of it?" said Coke.

"I!"

"There's no knowing——"

"There are two things known for certain sure. One, that I haven't any money to waste on such gaddings; and the other, that I'm not such a double-dyed ninny as to believe in dreams."

"Oh no, of course—well—nobody is," said Coke, a faint flush spreading over his fair white brow. "No more do I, you know. I shouldn't like you to think I do. They are the most stupid things in the world, dreams. I had one last night, ten times more absurd than yours, I do think."

"Marry!" laughed the pedlar, "then it must be interesting—amusing, I mean. Come, Master Coke, exchange is no robbery. Your dream for mine, eh?" he added good-naturedly,

for it was evident the boy was anxious to tell it.

“Oh, to be sure, if you like!” said Coke. “But it’s little enough to tell about; though it seemed a great deal while I was dreaming it. Well, I dreamt I was a grown-up man——”

“Let’s hope that’ll come true, at all events. You don’t look so far off it now,” said John, admiringly gazing at the tall stripling by his side.

“Ay, but my hair was grey and thin.”

“Well, and it becomes so soon enough,” sighed the pedlar, as he watched the sunlight glinting in the lad’s golden locks. “But go on, Master Edward, if I may call you so.”

“Oh, yes! And I had grown to be a famous and wise person.”

“You don’t say so!” said John, opening his eyes very wide, for neither did that seem to him a thing so very unlikely to come to pass.

“Wasn’t it curious?” said Coke. “And there I sat, perched up on some high sort of seat.”

“Not a throne?” cried John in alarm.

“Well, no. At least I don’t think it was. It had no gold on it, or precious stones. It

seemed like a large armchair all of beautiful carved wood."

"Oh!" said John, heaving a sigh of relief; "then it was safe and solid."

"Well—no. There's the jest of it," rather doubtfully smiled Coke. "It wasn't by any means so safe as you would imagine, for all at once, just as I was leaning back quite at my ease, my fine throne began to wobble, and though I stuck to it like a barnacle to a ship's timber, it was of no use. Over I toppled, and down I went."

"And when you got to the bottom?"

"But I didn't get to it. I woke up before that in a terrible fright. I suppose it must have been the rang-tangle-jang of our prayer bell woke me, for there it was ringing away, and a nice scuffle I had, too, to be down in time."

"It was a morning dream then?" said John.

"Ay," carelessly answered the boy; "what of that?" he added quickly, however, catching the look in his companion's face.

"Nothing, lad. Nothing, that is, but an old wife's tale, which has it that morning dreams come true. But there," added John after a

moment's silence, "is it to be thought of, I should stuff brains like yours with such trumpery?"

"I shouldn't so much care, mind you, for the tumbling part," said the boy half to himself, when the two trudged on again, after John had tapped at a lonely wayside cottage door, and succeeded in disposing of six yards of galloon; "and I would bravely like to sit upon such a mighty fine seat."

"Those who sit in such high places must risk the tumbles," said John, as he pocketed his half groat.

"Why, to be sure they must," said Coke. "And it's worth the risk, I do think."

"You do?" said John, turning his head to take rather a wondering look at his young companion's face. "Well, for my part I never was for playing Humpty Dumpty; and the more years run over my head, the oftener I say to myself, 'Keep on the flat ground, friend, and then tumble you can't'."

"You've no ambition," said Coke.

"No," said John, "I expect I haven't. Only my hankerings."

"Your what?"

"My hankerings. My notion of what I should like."

"And what is that?" inquired Coke.

"Why, for the piece of ground to be my own."

"What piece of ground?"

"Marry, the acre my cottage stands on."

"The house is yours, isn't it?" said Coke.

"To think of your knowing that now!" said the pedlar in amused surprise. "Well, yes, so please you, young master, it is, and it was my father's before me, and my grandfather's before him and me. My grandfather built it, and it was left to me," added John proudly; "but somehow it never rightly seems mine," he went on with a sigh, "while the ground it stands on isn't. It's for all the world like a boot that's got no sole, to my feelings. An upper, as we say, without an under."

"It's a pretty little piece of ground," said Coke.

"Little!" echoed John; "'tis as pretty nigh an acre, if not quite, young master, as you're five foot seven; and every inch of it is as dear to me as men mostly do find the soil they're born and bred on. I doubt I should never ask for more in this world, if 'twas mine; and all

that is on it, and under it for that matter, for 'tis mighty rich earth, for all it stands so near the Splashes."

"So I'm informed," said Coke. "And 'tis said the old earls of Castle Acre had their orchards thereabouts."

"And that's true, I expect," said John, "for there are two or three old fruit-trees, apple and pear mostly, and I've heard my father say he had heard his grandfather tell they were planted by an old monk of Castle Acre Priory. His name was Gen—Gen—no—beshrew me," went on John, wrinkling up his forehead, "if I can remember his name, Master Coke. It was a queer one."

"Gengulphus, was it?"

"Ay, Gengulphus it was."

"His portrait hangs in the dining-hall at Mileham. My ancestors bought it when the priory fell to ruin. Gengulphus was prior of the convent in the time of the Wars of the Roses, and when all from there to Swaffham was the Earl de Warrenne's property."

"As I would it were now," fervently said John, "or some honester man's than Master Badsworth."

"A hard landlord, I doubt," said Coke.

"Harder than frost. Spitefuller than hail. I would not accuse any man, but I do think 'twas he that set on young hopeful, your school-fellow, to harm my dog. Why? Because for the first time in my life I've been a bit behind in my ground rent. I begged Badsworth to let it stand over for a week or so. You see I was laid up above a month last winter with the rheumatics, and that threw me terribly behind. But he needn't have feared for his filthy lucre, for John Pennycuick never yet cheated another of his due."

"And he gets a good deal over and above that from you, I find," said Coke, "for his piece of ground, as he calls it. Pretty well double its fair value."

John Pennycuick's eyes grew rounder than ever. How in the world did this lad know that?

"I doubt you're not far wrong," he replied. "The ground, says Badsworth, is worth its weight in gold. To be sure he knows well enough that's how I look upon it, and that he wouldn't get half what I pay him for it from anyone else."

"No, he won't get it from me, for instance," laughed Coke.

"You!" cried the pedlar.

"Ay; when I'm of age I'm going to buy Castle Acre, and all that belongs to it."

"Bless the lad! What things boys say and dream of!" muttered John under his breath.

"Oh, that's no dream anyhow," said Coke, catching his words; "and you shall see how I'll settle Master Badsworth, and—what are you counting?" he interrupted himself, for John was counting with his fingers.

"Fourteen and seven," sighed the pedlar. "Seven years is a longish time, Master Coke."

"Oh, I see!" said the boy, with another amused laugh; "you're counting till I shall be twenty-one; but I come to years of discretion at eighteen."

"That's of a piece with the rest of you. The head on your young shoulders seems to me about the longest I ever saw or heard tell of, though I doubt its wisdom in thinking of buying Castle Acre. 'Tis a rare ramshackle out-at-elbows sort of place. Little more than barren ground and a heap of old flint stones. You ought to get it for a song."

"I don't mean to have to whistle for it," returned Coke.

"Marry!" said the pedlar in glad tones. "I'm fain though to think the old place is to be put together again in one grand estate, instead of being patched out, as it is now, a dab to this pitiful fellow, and a dob to that one, like dough-cakes on a baker's board. But anon, anon, young master, I must be mending my pace, else Shock will be wondering what's become of me. So fare you well, and all good luck befall you and your castles in the air till we meet again!"

"Which shall be to-night, God willing," said Coke, with a good-humoured smile at John's banter; "for I shall be in Swaffham as soon as you are, to call upon Shock. And hi! Master Pennycuick!" he called, as the pedlar disappeared among the almost meeting hawthorn hedges of a grass-grown lane. "Don't forget, I beg you, to call at the hall as you pass, and bid Joan, the cook, tell my mother you're come; for I heard her saying—'twas but this very forenoon before I started—she was sorely lacking some lawn for a new coif."

"Bless your kind heart!" murmured the

pedlar to himself, as he nodded assent and trudged on. "If John Pennycuick had his way, you should be lord of Castle Acre, and many an acre more in Norfolk."

CHAPTER V

CASTLE ACRE

TIME in the days of Queen Bess used to work pretty much as he does now, galloping and ambling with some, seeming almost to stand still with others; and though more than three years have passed since John Pennycuick, the pedlar, and his young friend Edward Coke walked together through Mileham lanes, you would hardly have guessed it to be longer ago than yesterday to look at John.

As for Master Shock, time has bettered him very much; and to see him now, nobody would imagine that he was ever laid up with a broken leg. It has long been as strong and ready for a twelve- or fifteen-mile run, as ever it was; and if he is a little more sober than in the days of latest puppyhood, that just has the effect of making him a more admirable dog than ever.

It is a pity that no such improvement is to be found in Shock's old enemy, Tom Badsworth. Years have only made him rather more objectionable as a youth just growing into a man, than he was as a lad. A more idle, worthless lout Norfolk has not to show. When he left Norwich grammar school, hardly less ignorant than he went in, his father entered him at Cambridge University, and thence he was returned for a hopelessly bad fellow. In despair of fitting him for a profession, he was next placed with a farmer of the neighbourhood, to see what he could make of that sort of work. But good farmers are not always produced out of bad scholars, and he made nothing. Farming, Tom would yawningly say, was not in his line; and nothing, in fact, did seem to be so, but poaching raids, cock-fights, bull-baitings, and any such mischief. There was nothing of that kind ever going on within twenty miles of his father's house, but he was there, wider awake than anybody; but at other times he slept away most of the hours of the day he did not employ in eating and drinking, so that at last the farmer refused any longer to keep Master Tom Badsworth at any price, and once more

he was returned for bad coin upon his father's hands, and not a soul pitied either; for, said everybody, the child was a pampered little suck-a-thumb from his cradle. If Master Bads-worth had only served his son to a tithe of the stern strictness with which he had treated everyone else he had dealings with, Tom would not be for him the thorn in the flesh he was now; and if there was a shred of pity for either, it was for the scapegrace himself.

So those people who insisted on making comparisons, though they were for ever being told such things are odious, would point to young Edward Coke, and say there, if you like, was son for widowed mother to be proud of, take him which way you pleased. Personally, though that may be setting the cart before the horse, and beauty is vain, still he was a fine, handsome young man, Edward Coke, with his keen, brilliant, greyish-blue eyes, well-formed brow, and firm, rather thinnish, but beautiful lips. Then his tall, slender figure was lithe and well-knit, and if a trifle bending already about the shoulders, that was small enough marvel, when you knew the hours on hours he spent over his books at college.



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WHILE HE ATE HE SURVEYED THE SCENE

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College days are, however, over for him now, and he lives in London, a student of the Inner Temple, coming home to Mileham only when he can spare a few days. He is not sorry the approach of Christmas once more affords him a good spell of leisure in the old home, and makes him feel once again like the grammar-school boy he used to be. The old Hall is full of guests; but whenever the young master can absent himself, away he is at Swaffham and Castle Acre. All this January afternoon, bleak, bitter, snowy one though it is, he has been at Castle Acre, and is making a roundabout way home by Swaffham.

Arrived at the top of the main street, he comes to a halt, tempted, no doubt, by the ruddy glow of firelight dancing on the panes of John Pennycuick's window, through whose bottle-green panes one can see the curious big shadows of the pedlar and his dog darting up, and fading down, and darting up afresh, as the two sit nodding drowsily after their cold day's trudge. The three are sworn friends, and old friends, too, now; and Shock, who knows Coke's step among a thousand footsteps, starts up from his dog's sleep, to greet the visitor as

he lifts the latch, and with a low, joyful bark which says plain as speech: "Here he is! here he is!" trots back before him to the ingle nook.

"You look frozen to the marrow, Master Edward," said John, as Coke seated himself in a corner of the settle, and having stroked and patted Shock, spread out both numbed hands in the welcome blaze; "and very pale and weary too."

"Ay. It cuts like a knife across the Splashes," answered Coke. "But I don't know," he went on; "there's something cuts keener than the wind, to my thinking, and that's seeing the misery those poor creatures yonder are suffering at Castle Acre. Cottages forsooth! There's not a sound brick or beam in the whole lot of them. Your pig is better housed, John."

"I doubt you've purchased a pig in a poke," said Pennycuick with a shake of the head; "and 'tisn't the first time I've told you so, Master Edward. Those cottages have belonged to Master Badsworth any time this score of years; and there's always more goes into his pockets than ever comes out of them. He's

a man, is Badsworth, who knows how to eat his cake, and keep it, too, in a manner of saying. I doubt the whole time he's been landlord of those hovels, for 'tis all they are at Castle Acre, he's never spent a groat on making them fit for living in, for all the poor wretches of tenants pay him such a pretty penny for them."

"The more foolish they for remaining."

"You speak like the lad you are," said John. "Moving goods and chattels costs money poor folks can't just always call up when they want it. So, for fear of getting into the fire, they stop in the frying-pan and frizzle."

"Freeze, you mean," shivered Coke. "Well, well. There's an end to it now. Please Heaven, I'll see quickly to their mending up, for I'm their landlord now—at least in three weeks I shall be; and on the first of next month——"

"Your birthday."

"My birthday,—I sign the deeds that make Castle Acre mine."

"That's brave hearing," said John. "And my next reckoning, then, will be paid to your honour."

Coke smiled.

“That’s as it may be,” he said. “But I tell you what it is, John: Master Badsworth’s an old rascal, and he puts all the difficulties he can think of, in the way of my getting this property. It all looks as easy as two and two. Here am I, wanting to buy Castle Acre, Government has long wanted to sell it—the whole, in one big piece as once it was, when it belonged to Earl de Warrenne, instead of parcelling it out in shreds and patches to a herd of small landlords. Landlords, forsooth! who make all they can get by under-letting it, and allow it to tumble to rack and ruin, so that in a few more years the property wouldn’t be worth ten groats. Isn’t it so?”

“It is so,” assented John.

“Very well. I go to Government with the money in my hand.”

“As good as that—yes,” nodded John, all attention.

“And I offer to buy up the whole for a fair price.”

“Not what you’re asked, of course, Master Edward?”

“Why no; not quite,” laughed Coke. “The Crown lawyers are rare pedlars, John, and——”

“’Tis said you know a shilling from a crown, Master Edward,” slyly put in John.

“Is it? Well, one has to be prudent in these hard times; but I offer to buy it all up, on a promise to redeem the land from its ruinous state, and make it a credit to the county.”

“And you’re an honest promiser,” said John. “Well?”

“Well, Government accepts the proposal—”

“And wise of it too.”

“Yes; but there comes the rub. I ask for one acre more.”

“How’s that?”

“I want your acre.”

“My acre?”

“The one your cottage stands on. Here where we sit.”

“But that’s not wanting one more, Master Edward. ’Tis Castle Acre property, and therefore would become yours by right. I’ve heard my father say so, times again.”

“Badsworth swears it was transferred,” said Coke, looking thoughtful, “by the last earl. Made over. Sold right out to strangers. It did once belong to Castle Acre. That he

acknowledges. What else can he do with the old title-deeds staring him in the face?"

"Ay, I should think so," said John. "It only wants my old apple trees to speak to that."

"I would they could," smiled Coke. "And according to my reading of the title-deeds, it was not possible to convey the land."

"Why no, that's but common sense," said John.

"I don't think you quite understand me," said Coke, smiling. "Convey is the law term—word, don't you know—for making over. Master Badsworth is mighty precise over his legal terms, I can tell you, and above all, law, he says, is law, and law he'll have. So he shall, when I'm a year or two older, or my name's not Edward Coke; for I'll to the bottom of the question."

"But what right has he to object?" said John. "None of the other leaseholders have done so."

"None that I can discover. The ground's not worth two groats, he says; and yet, away he goes to London, directly he finds his acre likely to be taken, and pulls out a cartload of

parchments and papers to prove he's in the right. The bigwigs at Westminster pat him on the back, and tell him: 'Quite so, Master Badsworth, quite so. You see it perfectly in the proper light.'"

"In faith, Master Edward, but you're made to be one of them!" cried John, bursting into a fit of laughter at the lad's manner of imitating the bigwigs, as he called them. "Made to be one of them; don't your monkey tricks show it?"

" 'I tell you what it is, my lords,' says Badsworth," continued Coke. "'This Edward Coke is a grasping young horseleech, and as stubborn as any pig; and if he lives long enough, you'll have trouble with him, mark my words. I believe he would buy up all the county if he could.' Supposing I did," broke off Coke, "supposing I did, John, I can't see I should be to blame, if I turned what I bought to good account."

"But about this acre here?" said John.

"Well. The beginning and end of it is, that this fellow refused to part with the remainder of his lease of the acre—during the time he has still a right to it, you know—unless I pay

over to him now, double what he would receive for it from you."

"Well?"

"Well, I've accepted his terms."

"No, Master Edward, you've been no such idiot."

"I don't think I'm an idiot," said Coke, with a quiet smile; "but the bargain's struck, and the acre becomes mine, along with the rest of the estate, on the day I'm eighteen. Three weeks hence."

"And folks say trust you for knowing which side your bread's buttered," muttered the pedlar, kicking over in his anger the little three-legged stool he had been sitting on, till he had started up overcome by surprise. "You mean to tell me, that you're going to pay money for what is yours by right? Why, the very asses in the field will laugh at you as you go by."

"To say nothing of a good many more outside it. Well, seriously, John, it's like this, *He gives twice who gives quickly.*"

"Ay, marry, then at that rate you give four times, for you own to giving twice its value, and you're going to give that directly."

"Oh, well! Law is a sad laggard, and

sometimes years run away, and even death comes, while one is settling a little matter of *meum et tuum*."

"A matter of what?" said Pennycuick, who was working into a real fit of ill-temper. "Your Latin and your law are well enough for them who understand, I make no doubt. What's *meum* and *tuum*? Give me the plain English of it."

"Mine and thine. And the plain English of it is, that this acre we're talking about is mine, and I want to make it thine. You'll accept it, won't you, John, from your old friend?"

"Master Edward!" cried Pennycuick, hardly trusting his own ears.

"You said 'twas the one thing in the world you wished for."

"Ay, ay," said John, blinking and squeezing up his eyelids, for his eyes had grown quite misty all of a moment.

"And no man has a better right to it; for already, to my thinking, you've paid for it many times over."

"You ought to be Lord Chief Justice of England!" admiringly said John Pennycuick. "But no, no, I can't accept it. It's too generous of you, Master Edward, I oughtn't."

"Oughtn't!" laughingly echoed Coke. "Well, strictly speaking, you're right. If indeed we must only speak by the letter of the law, as set down in the old earl's title-deeds, you're right, and it's the very grievance I bear against Master Badsworth. The owner of the Castle Acre property is not allowed to make a free gift of as much as an inch of it; so you will have to hold the ground of me, as folks once held it of Lord de Warrenne—in fief."

"In thief!" cried John, whose brain was still in too much of a whirl to hear distinctly.

"In fief, man, fief. That is to say, that every year you and your heirs for ever, must pay me and my heirs for ever, a fee for your holding of the acre."

"Ay," nodded John, "with all my heart."

"And this shall be your fee: Twelve big, ripe, rosy apples off your best apple tree."

"Ay, ay!" joyfully cried John. "Old Prior Gengulphus's apple tree."

"Is it a bargain then?" said Coke, rising as he spoke, and stretching out his hand in farewell; "for you know what a fellow I've always been for a good apple."

"Oh, Master Edward!" cried the overjoyed

man, his grateful tears and kisses fairly falling now on the slender hand of his benefactor, as he seized it in both his own; "if John Penny-cuick had his will, every apple of the twelve should be ripe red gold to the core. To think Heaven should send Shock and me such a friend as you!"

But Coke, as he plodded homeward, felt that there was something better than even gold and mere earthly possessions in the world; and that was the content which comes from doing a kind action to those who deserve it. And like the page of good King Wenceslas, when he trod in his master's footsteps, and felt them warm for all their depth of snow, he hardly felt the snow or the cutting east wind, blowing direct in his face—his heart glowed so warmly. Hark! listen! yes, it was the Twelfth Night Was-sailers, singing before the lighted windows of Mileham Hall:

It is a noble part
To bear a liberal mind:
God bless our master's heart,
For here we comfort find,
With our Wassel.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN DREAMS AGAIN

WHEN Coke was gone, John Pennycuick raked out his fire and went to bed. He had a long hard tramp before him next day; for at Christmas and New Year time there was always a good trade to be done in ribbons, and ballad sheets, and posy rings, and suchlike articles, if only one was afoot in good time.

John found, however, that it was one thing to go to bed, and quite another to go to sleep. Turn and twist, and count up to a thousand, and spell words backwards, as he would, not a wink of sleep could he get, for thinking of his piece of good fortune. Though he was never quite sure about it, he always had a great idea he heard the town cocks crowing before he fell at last into a sleep, which was such a long one when it did come, that there is no telling when he would have wakened, if it had not been for Shock, who came and scratched at the bed-coverings and poked his cold nose into his master's face, telling him as plain as dog could, that it was time to be stirring—more than time.

“Quite right, old fellow, quite right!” smiled John, starting up and hurrying on his clothes. “’Twill never do for thy master to turn slug-a-bed because he’s turned landowner. That would be for all the world like the unprofitable servant parson reads about to us on Sundays, who hid his lord’s talent in a napkin, instead of turning it to good account. And talking of hiding,” he went on, as he shared his morning draught of milk with Shock, and pocketed their bread to eat as they were going along,—“talking of hiding, what queer thing was that I dreamed last night? Ay, ay, for sure; ’twas about the old apple tree that stands in the orchard corner. Well-a-day! and no such wonder either—and how its apples were as hard as thunderbolts, and when the wind blew and shook them down, they were so heavy that they fell right through into the ground; so that it was all the pother in the world to get them out again for giving to his honour, as I wanted to be doing. Then, Master Edward, he said—now, beshrew me if he said aught; for though he opened his mouth to speak, just then somehow, the dream changed, and then—” and then the pedlar’s merry burst of laughter rang out upon the frosty air.

“Marry! is it not enough to make thee laugh?” he went on, as the dog’s brown eyes turned up at him in grave astonishment; “for did not I dream again that foolish, nonsensical, absurd, silly old dream about going up to London, and standing on London Bridge, and the rest of it. Was ever the like? If it had not been for you, old friend, I might have been dreaming it still, like any half-crazed old witch-wife, instead of being up and doing. Dreams, forsooth! let’s be sensible and reasonable.”

As to being reasonable, who could have said he was not, that Twelfth Day morning, in the price of his wares? He was so happy and light of heart, that he felt he could have given them away. The matrons, and lasses, and lads, who bought them, had no excuse for beating him down. But he found it a harder matter to be sensible; for strive as he might to forget that strange dream, come back it would, and not that day only, but for days after, until the important first of February came round, and put everything else out of his head, as, in fact, it did with most other folks round Mileham.

It was a great day indeed for all the tenantry and neighbours. There was an ox roasted

whole in the Hall kitchen, and bonfires in the village, and dancing after supper, and much drinking of the young heir's health in sack, and nut-brown ale, and a great deal of merry fising and fiddling; but the great and noteworthy event of the day was the moment when Edward Coke signed his name, with a true scholarly flourish, to the deeds which made him lord of the estate of Castle Acre. When that was done, came John Pennycuick's turn. How his heart beat, as at a sign from Coke he approached the great table set in the middle of the grand dining-hall, at which sat the lawyers and the young master, who himself placed the pen in John's hand, that he also might set his mark to the bottom of the closely written parchment, setting forth the gift of the acre on which his cottage stood in the parish of Swaffham, to John Pennycuick, to do as he would with, for a yearly payment of twelve ripe, red apples out of the orchard of the aforesaid acre. What a queer grimace Master Badsworth, who was forced to be present, made of it, in his effort to look agreeable, when he could have torn off all his own hair, and Coke's, and John's too, with vexation! But it was all no use, he

had other dealings with the young lord of the manor, which made it necessary for him not to irritate him too much; and if thus ungraciously, still to comply.

There was a look of pleasure in Coke's beautiful eyes, John never forgot to his dying day, as he rolled up the parchment, with the big seal dangling to it by a green ribbon, and gave it into John's hands, telling him that now he was master of his acre, as entirely as he, Coke, was lord of Castle Acre. "And don't forget the apples, John," he added.

"Never fear, Master Edward," murmured John, as well as he could, out of his full heart, which indeed so brimmed over, that it would not let him say at all the little grateful speech he had prepared for the occasion.

Time, however, had fled on since that never-to-be-forgotten day. Coke had long returned to London and his studies in the Temple. Whitsuntide had come round once more, and Necton Fair was at hand. As for Castle Acre, excepting that its new owner had lost no time in having the poor cottages at the foot of the hill made weather-tight, all was in much the same condition as it had been for the last two



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THE DREAM OF THE OLD APPLE TREE

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hundred years; and was so to remain till the end of the autumn, when Coke, who wished to superintend the improvements himself, should be home for the long vacation.

The pedlar's acre was meantime getting into brave trim. John, who had once dared hardly so much as turn a spadeful of earth in his garden, through fear of Master Badsworth finding fault with him for so doing, had been very busy mowing his grass till it was green and velvety as scythe could make it. Then he had dug, and hoed, and raked, and pruned, and tidied up, till the acre was a sight for sore eyes, with its budding roses, and gilly-flowers, and pansies, growing so gaily in their neat borders round the cottage. Away lower down, beyond the juniper hedge, was John's kitchen-garden, full of onions and asparagus, celery, mint, parsley, and all heart could desire in the way of vegetables and pot-herbs. At the bottom of this half of the acre, you passed by a little white-painted wicket into the orchard, which, if it was not very large, was full of plenty of fine fruit trees. In one corner of its old high flint boundary-wall, John had built a neat fowl-house, and such eggs as the hens

laid, had not their like in Swaffham; and no wonder, for what hens had fairer spot to forage the livelong day in, than this orchard with its pink and white blossom overhead, and the long Lent-lily studded grass under foot?

As for the old apple tree, which was said to be as old as Castle Acre itself, John Penny-cuick treated it as if it was the king of the place. He never tired of gazing at its queer crooked branches, clothed now in the beautiful blossom, which promised so well for that day when he should gather those twelve ripe, red apples for the young lord of the manor. Rare brave apples they would be, he felt certain, if blossom could foretell fruit, as one had been able to foretell from the boyhood of his benefactor what his manhood would be like. Early as that yet was, reports of his cleverness and the esteem he was held in, by all who knew him in London, reached his widowed mother in her quiet Norfolk home, and consoled her not a little at being separated from him. She often thought to herself, poor lady, that her happiness would have been complete, if only her husband were still living to share her proud content in her good and clever son.

John Pennycuick still continued his daily tramps with his pack as steadily as ever. What he earned in that way, added to the gain from the sale of his garden produce, and new-laid eggs, and his bit of cobbling work, helped to get him along more comfortably than of yore. Still, toil as he might, he was only a very poor man, and not, as he was wont to say, getting younger; he felt it was necessary to try and lay up what store he could, against the time when he should be no longer able to face the wind and weather; for if he lived to see such a time, he was anxious to be a burden to no one. "We must make hay while the sun shines, eh, old fellow?" he would say to Shock, as he strolled of an evening in the orchard, while the dog careered about among the tall grass, or inspected every hole and corner of the old walls.

One evening when John had begun to think about mowing the grass, which the hot spring sun had made ready for the sickle, Shock seemed to be taking him at his word, for all at once, as he was sniffing about at the trunk of the old apple tree, he tossed up his head, gave a short, eager, low bark, and then set to

work with might and main to tear and scratch at the turf that lay just underneath one stout, crooked old branch. "Hi, then, thou varlet, leave it alone. Dost hear?" shouted John.

The dog paused in the middle of his exertions, and with legs outstretched, tail straight as a ship's bowsprit, ears cocked, and his red tongue panting out of his wide-open jaws, he stared hard at his master through the tangle of dry grass in which he had enveloped himself, with an eager questioning in his clear brown eyes.

"What ails the fellow?" quoth John to himself. Wanting actual words to explain, Shock turned to with redoubled energy at his scratching, and John began to grow seriously angry with him. "I'll teach you to damage my orchard, you vagabond!" he said, as he came out, driving the dog before him, and double-bolting the wicket; which was, to be sure, of not much use, had Shock been bent on further excavations, seeing that he could quite as soon take a flying leap over the gate as look at it. Whether, however, like most dogs worthy the name, he did not deem it necessary to use his power just because he had it, or whether he

was tired with his hard work, or whether he really did not care a button about the matter, he only just trotted on, wagging his tail carelessly as he went, as if he would say: "All right, master, all right! Do as you think proper; only don't say I didn't tell you."

Was it much to be wondered at, that John dreamed that night of the old apple tree, especially considering that when he did dream, which was far from being every night (for hard work made a brave sound sleeper of him), it so frequently formed part of his dreams, so that after Shock's absurd behaviour what was to be expected? Why, however, in the name of common sense, the dream apple tree should shrink, and shrivel, and fade, and then spread out as it did, into the figure of a tall old man with a shaven crown, half hidden under a black hood, and wearing a long black gown—for all the world like the picture of Prior Gengulphus hanging on the walls of the great dining-hall at Mileham—and in deep and solemn, but friendly tones, bid him go without delay up to London, and stand on London Bridge, where he should hear joyful news. Why for the third time, and clearer than ever, that dream should

befall him, was a puzzle indeed to John Penny-cuick, when he awoke and strove to collect his wits.

That in itself was not such an easy task; for almost over his head the bells of Swaffham church rang a noisy peal to tell all the world it was holiday time.

“Ay, ay! go your ways! Ring your loudest!” cried John, clasping both hands upon his whirling brain, as he listened to the clash and clang, and the merry laughter and patter of the folks hastening past to the fair. “Whit Monday again, is it? Well, Necton won’t see me to-day, wit or no wit. I’m for London this very hour. That dream will be the death of me else. It means aught, or it means naught; and I’ll to the bottom of it, cost what it may.”

Now going to London in Queen Elizabeth’s time cost a pretty penny. But John had saved up and saved up, till there was a fair little sum in the heel of the old stocking which he kept locked carefully away in the oaken corner cupboard. Now he opened the cupboard, untied the stocking, and took out of it a good half of what it contained, which was all he had in the

world. Then he gave Shock his breakfast, which the careless light-hearted fellow ate with his usual appetite. But John himself could scarcely swallow a crumb for thinking of the journey that lay before him and making his preparations, though these were simple enough. To begin with, he strapped his pack up neat and tight and put it in a corner. Then he made a little bundle of clean linen to take with him, and having dressed himself in his Sunday jerkin and breeches, he took his staff in his hand, swung his bundle over his shoulder, and with Shock, who did not wait to be invited to go too, he went out and locked his door.

Outside, he stood still, thought for a moment, then he went up the street as far as the next cottage, and tapping at the door, he begged the kind-hearted neighbourly dame who lived there, to give his chickens a feed and a look after; "for," said he, "I shall be out early and late these next few days."

"Why, to be sure, I doubt I know that," said the dame, casting an admiring glance over John's figure. "Isn't it Necton Fair time? Never fear, Master Pennycuick, your chicks sha'n't be a feather the worse if you stopped

away a week. I'll be surety for them. But where's your pack, man?"

"My pack?" said John, who had no intention of telling the good woman whither he was going, for her tongue was almost as long as her heart was kind. "Oh, my pack's right enough;" and away he went, before she had time to say any more, whistling loudly to Shock.

At the corner leading to the crossways, Shock paused for a moment, looking along the road to Necton and then up in his master's face; but John just shaking his head, faced opposite way about, and away in front of him bounded Shock, barking short, joyous barks all the way he went, as much as to say, like the faithful old servant in the play Master Shakspeare had just then written:—

"Master, go on—and I will follow thee
To the last gasp, with truth and loyalty".

For east, west, north, or south, so long as John was only there, it was all one to Shock.

CHAPTER VII

IN LONDON

As the crow flies, he has a good hundred miles to travel if he wants to get from Swaffham to London, or the other way about, which is more likely for a crow. A hundred miles was a matter of three or four days in Queen Bess's time, as it is one of three or four hours in ours. Especially it was a long stretch for poor folks like John Pennycuick, whose pockets were not lined with gold, but stored with only a scanty sum to meet his every need.

John was never quite able to tell how he did get to London; and whether he did not take rather a roundabout road to it. Be that as it might, he went the greater part of the way on foot; sometimes, however, getting a lift for himself and Shock in a passing wagon. Once or twice, he had himself hoisted atop of the sacks and bundles of a pack horse's back, until he felt so churned and bone-sore, that he entreated to be hauled down again. At night he found supper and shelter in wayside cottages, and so at last he came to Islington.

It seemed a nice place, as much as John

could see of it, with its fair fields and hedgerows and brooklets; not unlike Swaffham, only more countrified, or at least more hilly and greener. Altogether he liked the place better than he did the people in it, for they were pert, and appeared inclined to amuse themselves at his expense; for when he asked some carters and farm people, who were hanging about the door of the inn at which he stopped for a glass of ale, how much farther London was, they grinned at one another, and asked him if the folks in the parts he came from didn't wear eyes, because yonder could be seen Westminster towers, plain as the nose on his face? And when John, after straining his eyes a bit, succeeded in seeing some dim outlines in the mists covering the distant flat land before him, explained that it was London not Westminster he wanted, the ill-graced fellows grinned broader than ever, and said the walk from London to Westminster was not longer than his dog's tail, as any idiot could tell him.

Thanking the speaker for his information, John trudged on, pausing now and again to watch the bowmen practising at their targets in Finsbury Fields. Very soon, however, the

houses began to grow closer together, and just as some big bell boomed out eleven overhead, he reached the bottom of the longish downhill way he had come.

Before him, in a broad space surrounded by gabled houses, whose lower stories were open booths exposing goods of all sorts for sale, stood a church. The size of it almost took John's breath away; and though he had always imagined that no church could be half so beautiful as Swaffham church, he could not but own that this one was far finer. "What church is that, friend?" he asked of the first passer-by, a rather foppishly attired man.

"Paul's," answered the man.

"Paul's is it? I thought as much," said John in well-pleased tones, as he turned to look at it again. "Eh, marry! and if the inside of it's as fine as the outside is, I would fain see it before I go a step farther," he added longingly.

"Well, why not? Go in and make sure. 'Tis free to all," said the showily dressed man, who spoke a trifle loftily, but still was more civil than the Islington fellows had been. "You needn't be shy. At this hour 'tis always as full as it can hold of rag-tag and bobtail."

“Ay, bobtail,” said John, glancing at Shock, “that’s where ’tis, don’t you see. I’ve my dog with me.”

“Well, and what if you have?” said the man, glancing at Shock too.

“Marry!” answered John testily, “dogs aren’t admitted into churches where I come from.”

“Where do you come from?” asked the Londoner, eyeing John from top to toe. “What’s your shire?”

“Ne’er a one,” said John.

“Your county then?”

“That’s neither here nor there; but wherever ’tis, I say they don’t let dogs into the churches. I’ve tried it on times again, for it’s a sin and a shame they won’t, to my ways of thinking! Now, my dog Shock there, he’s a pattern to many calling themselves Christians. You would never see him ogling his neighbours, and settling his tags and fallals half through sermon time, and snoring through the other half, though I would not quite go bail for him that he would not snatch his forty winks as well as the best of them. But ’tis no use. As our verger says: ‘Law’s law, John Pennycuick,

and though I grant you, Shock there's a rare well-mannered dog, 'tis as much as my place is worth to be letting him in,' he says; and so on Sunday mornings, when I go into church, he sits in the porch till I come out again, and snaps at the flies. I mean to be even with them, though, one of these days," added John after a moment's thought, "and alive or dead I'll have Shock into Sw—— my parish church."

"What parish church did you say?"

"I didn't say. I'll have Shock, that's what I said, alive or dead, inside of the church, or my name's not——"

"Ay?" said the man.

"Eh, marry! no matter for my name," said John bluntly.

"Well, well, we're not so mighty particular as all that up here in London," said the man.

"Why, only just as you came up, I saw a blind man pass in at the porch yonder with his dog."

"What could he be wanting?" said John, who thought that eleven o'clock, when everybody was going to dinner, was a bad time for any public service or sermon preaching; and as for viewing the beauties of the church, a blind man, alas, could see nothing of them.

"Gone to dinner I expect, poor varlet," laughed his casual acquaintance.

"Dinner?" echoed John.

"Ay, with Duke Humphrey, don't you know?"

But John did not know; he only stared in utter bewilderment.

"Why don't you join the party?" continued the man with a faint smile, as he eyed the cut of John's Sunday clothes, and the strength of his boot soles; "you and your dog."

"We're not invited," said John hungrily.

"Oh, that's nothing. You'll not be turned away."

"Think not?" said John with rising courage.

"Try."

"Why, so I will; and a fair good day to you, and many thanks," said John in grateful farewell. After some difficulty with Shock, who appeared to know a church door from any other door wherever he might be, and for some time declined to enter, the two found themselves inside. They had scarcely taken half a dozen steps, however, before a loud clatter on the flag floor, and an angry reminder to see where he was shoving to, caused him to look up, to find

himself staring into the very eyes of a mule, which his owner was leading by a cord through the aisle of the cathedral, as the nearest and most convenient way home. Saving himself as well as he could from this danger, John stood for a moment gazing round in dumb amazement at seeing and hearing a perfect Babel going on.

“No wonder,” thought he, as he stared at the crowd hurrying to and fro in the aisles where he stood, and the broad nave beyond, and gathered in knots, lounging and chattering at their ease—from my lord in his velvet and embroideries to the beggar in his rags—and the men carrying beer-casks and parcels, and bakers’ boys with their bread baskets, and the fruit girls offering their wares all about the sacred place. “No wonder they let in an orderly beast like my Shock. Didn’t I say he was a lesson to his betters? Betters forsooth!” and for the moment, forgetting all his hunger in his dismay at seeing the house of God so profaned, he walked on, ignorant, of course, which way he was going.

Scarcely had he taken a few more steps, than a fast gathering crowd again hindered them;

and he found himself pushed hither and thither by a throng of gaping loungers all eagerly gathering round two fellows in their midst, who stood, anger flashing from their eyes, each armed with a short unsheathed dagger, which they appeared about to use upon one another.

“Leave hold!” growled one of the would-be fighters to a third man, who showed some desire to patch up the quarrel. “Leave hold of my arm or ’twill be the worse for you. He’s a cheat. A rascally knave, who promised to pay me five shillings for the job I’ve done for him, and now he wants to cry off for four. He said——”

“I didn’t,” sullenly roared the other man; “I said——”

“We’ll soon see what was said,” cried the swaggering bully; but as he took a step back to spring on his enemy, a firm hand seized him by the shoulder and held him fast. Thus balked of his intention, he turned furiously on the newcomer, a tall slender man dressed in black but rich attire, whose face, however, John Pennycuick could not see for the swaying of the crowd.

“Now then, young inkpot, who are you?”

demanded the fellow with a savage laugh, and in tones which had a ring of cowardice, while his purple-red face paled to his lips.

“Who gives you leave to stop a righteous—discussion?”

“The law of the land,” answered a calm musical voice, which set John Pennycuick’s heart leaping for joy, and Shock’s ears all aprick.

“Pooh!” laughed the man amid a chorus of laughter on all sides; “isn’t it done every day and all day?”

“The greater shame,” answered the young man, “that this house of prayer should so be made a den of thieves and brawlers, to say nothing of the fear of God, and the honour of the queen, who but last week issued through her common council, an act forbidding these unseemly scenes.”

“I care not,” cried the braggart, “for queen or——”

“Shame! Shame!” hissed the bystanders.

“Let him pay me my shilling then, Master Lawyer,” glared the angry creditor.

“If ’tis truly your due, my Lord Mayor will see you have it,” calmly replied Master Lawyer;

“but if you do not give up your shameless and senseless brawling immediately, and go your ways peacefully, he will also see that you spend your hour in the pillory, with your ears nailed to a post and then cut off; for that is the law of the land,” added the young man, looking round, where the lazy loons of watchmen were beginning to rouse from their doze at the sound of the disturbance; while the two fighters, having exchanged parting glares, slunk away in opposite directions through the dispersing crowd, leaving the young man standing alone; but only for one half-instant, then Shock was upon him, half frantic with delight.

“Why, Shock!” cried the young man in amazement.

“Master Coke!” cried John.

“John Pennycuick!” cried Coke, for he it was.

CHAPTER VIII

A FORTUNATE MEETING

"WHERE did you spring from?" he added, stretching out his hand in pleased greeting.

"Oh, we walked," said John soberly—"pretty nigh all the way, that is."

"From Swaffham!" said Coke. "Marry, that's a fair stretch. And what good spirit moved you to do it?"

John hesitated. Sometimes, as he footed it on through those long weary miles, he had had his doubts as to the wisdom of the move.

"Well, you see, Master Edward, that dream——" he began.

"Oh ay, the dream. Well?" laughed Coke. "You dreamed it again, did you?"

"And again. Three times over. Think of that!"

For a moment the young man looked thoughtful. Last night for the third time he had dreamed of his high but insecure throne.

"I hope it may not be a fool's errand, Master Coke," said John doubtfully.

"I doubt it is not that, come what may of

it," said Coke; "for now you'll see London and all its brave sights, as many a time you've said you wished."

"I would have gone a good way round sooner than have seen the sorry one I saw just now," said John gravely. "If that's your fine civilized London town, give me the country and—my acre."

"Ay; and how are the apples getting on, John?"

"Bravely! I warrant they'll be ruddier, one of these days, than your cheeks are now, Master Edward. You look mortal pale," said John, anxiously scanning the young man's face.

"One gets a little tired about this time of day," said the student, excusing his looks. "And I usually take an airing up Ludgate, and a turn in Paul's Walk here, before I go to dinner. Where are you lodging?"

"Nowhere yet. I'm but just come."

"And dined?"

"N—no," said John; "but if your Londoners are quarrelsome, they're kind and hospitable. I've an invitation to dinner already."

"Have you, now?" said Coke. "Who from?"

“Duke Humphrey.”

“You’d better take pot-luck with me, John,” said Coke, a gleam of mirth breaking into his eyes as they rested on John’s solemn face.

John hesitated. Coke was a dear friend and a great gentleman; but then to be able to say he had dined with a duke!

“I was just about to ask my way to his grace’s,” he said, “when those brawling varlets stopped me; good luck to them all the same.”

“And you’re bent on dining with Duke Humphrey?”

“By your good leave, Master Edward. I would bravely like to see his dinner-table, anyhow.”

Without speaking, Coke took John Pennycuick by the hand, and conducting him some few paces up the nave of the church, through a crew of beggars, stretching out their grimy hands for alms, he pointed to a large carven tomb upon which lay a mail-clad marble figure as large as life. “There ’tis,” he said. “And that is Duke Humphrey. Shall I introduce you to his guests?”

John Pennycuick shrank back.

“’Tis a jest,” continued Coke. “A sorry

one on a stranger, to my thinking. The miserable creatures you see here, having by either fault or misfortune of their own, no dinner to go to, come to yonder tomb to beg it. Or, if they have a morsel, to eat it. Or else to feign they have been dining, sitting on the tomb-steps waiting till their more fortunate acquaintances have finished their dinners. But it grows late. Let us go and dine in right good earnest. Will you come?"

"And thank you kindly for the honour you do me, Master Edward," said John, humbly following his companion, who turned as he spoke and left the cathedral by the nearest door. After crossing the churchyard and passing through a narrow alley, they found themselves before the door of a tavern, above which hung a board painted with the picture of a castle.

"If you don't dine with a duke," said Coke, pointing up to the sign, "at least you shall in a castle."

"And 'tis for all the world like Castle Acre, too," said John, gazing admiringly up at the picture, as he followed Coke into the lobby of the tavern, "with the trees, and the bridge, and the river, and all."

The large guest-room of the tavern in which they now found themselves was crowded with people of all sorts; sober citizens, as one could see by the good broad-cloth they wore, apprentices, officers, sparkish gentlemen of the town, foreigners, country squires, and studious-looking Templars like John's companion.

"Where will you please to dine, sir?" inquired a drawer of Coke, as, followed closely by John, he steered his way through the throng.

"Here," replied Coke, seating himself in one of two high-backed comfortable armchairs at a table which stood in the bay of a window overlooking the street, and motioning John to take the other chair, which he did very quickly, for the table was cleanly and neatly spread with a snowy damask cloth, and crowned in the centre with a bowl of gillyflowers and a large silver salt-cellar.

While the drawer hastened to fulfil the orders which Coke had given for their dinner, Shock, to while away the time till it appeared, took a tour of the room; and if here and there he met with a rebuff for inspecting the tables too closely, he received more pats on his shaggy head, and a good many tit-bits, for the vastly

grave and businesslike manner in which he sat up on hind legs and asked for a mouthful. He returned, however, in good time to superintend the removal of the cover from the dish now set before Coke, which contained a savoury stew of beef.

"Now, fall to," said Coke, setting John a good example, for his appetite had been whetted by the delay of his little adventure in the cathedral.

Until the stew was finished, and the blackjack beginning to show that it was not inexhaustible, John and his entertainer hardly exchanged a word; but when John assumed dinner to be at an end, and had so little relish for the woodcock now set before them, that Shock's valuable help had to be called in, not to dispose of the bones only, but also of the greater part of the meat covering them, he began to look about him. The novel scene greatly amused and interested him; there were card-playing gallants, and in the corner a smartly clad, but slightly out-at-elbows gentleman reading aloud some rhymes on a slip of paper to a small admiring audience. Presently John's eyes rested with rather puzzled gaze on a noisy fellow of

military appearance, who was seated on the edge of a table surrounded by a crowd of gaping listeners.

"What may he be talking about?" enquired John.

"Which one?" said Coke, looking round.

"Yon fellow swinging his fists about like pump-handles, for though he talks like thunder, beshrew me if I can catch a word he says."

"It signifies little enough, I'll dare swear," laughed Coke. "He has been with Drake maybe, and saw the burning of St. Domingo, or says he did. Or, belike he is one of your monkeys who has seen the world, and is cramming the gulls' heads round him with his tales of Prester John. Or—see—now—what is that he draws out of his pocket! A goat's horn? Eh, well, my life on it, he's telling them 'tis the horn of a unicorn!"

"It seems to me," said John, "that London tells more falsehoods in an hour than Swaffham does in a score of years. And what with Prester John and Duke Humphrey, I doubt Shock and I had better have stopped at home, for all the news we shall come upon."

"Nay, nay!" protested Coke.

“And if so be ’twere joyful as a May Day fiddle tune, if ’twere not true, ’twould be no joy to me.” And then as John looked out into the busy street, there was something very like tears in his eyes.

“Come, come! Don’t say that, John,” said Coke. “There’s honour and truth in town—”

“As there’s a needle to be found in a bottle of hay,” grumbled John, but half pleased.

“And I your needle then,” laughed his entertainer, “which shall be your compass to point you all the ways you go; for ’tis, I grant you, a vast ensnaring city.”

“And a true compass you are, Master Edward; we know that. Don’t we, Shock?” said the pedlar, brightening up.

“Come then,” said Coke, when he had settled the reckoning and they were outside in the street again, “and we will go and see some of the lions.”

“Lions?” echoed John, looking rather shrinkingly round. “What lions?”

“Why, man, the sights of London, I mean.”

“Then why didn’t you say what you mean? You’re as bad as the rest, Master Edward!” said Pennycuick in reproachful tones.

"Not quite," said Coke; "for if the sights mayn't be all lions, the lions in the Tower are a sight you must see."

"Oh, ay," said John. "I know that's truth, of course; for didn't I see them in the peep-show at Necton Fair last year. Which way do they lie? Near London Bridge?" for John was bent on his business in the great city.

"Within a stone's throw."

"Why, then, have with you, Master Edward!" joyfully cried John.

"Nay, no. Now I think on't," said Coke; "not to-day, for it grows late, and business is getting over. To-morrow forenoon you shall go eastward, where the Tower stands. This afternoon we will go westward."

Though for a moment John looked longingly behind him, he soon forgot his regrets in wonder at the strange things he saw on every side of him, as, closely followed by Shock, he accompanied his guide down the hill, at the bottom of which lay Ludgate, at that time one of the openings in the old wall surrounding the city, and used as a place of confinement for debtors. As they passed through, John followed Coke's example and dropped a penny

into the box which hung on the wall for the poor unfortunate prisoners within, and the next moment they found themselves upon the bridge crossing the little Fleet river which ran straight away to Holborn, a quarter of a mile or so beyond, and looking up the broad fine way called Fleet Street, which was the great highway from the City to Westminster, and whose grand abbey towers you could see through the trees fringing the winding river.

In those days, however, hedges, and orchards, and gardens surrounded the houses lining each side of Fleet Street, though it was even then a very busy place, with its printing presses, and learned lawyers, and scholars who met in its lanes and alleys.

CHAPTER IX

LONDON SIGHTS

Just at the corner, after crossing the bridge, stood the palace of Bridewell, which had been a favourite one with King Henry the Eighth; but, perhaps because it had sad ideas connected with it in his daughter Elizabeth's mind, was

now given up for a State prison. Next came a large space of ground, which up till not very long ago had been occupied by a monastery belonging to the White Friars, but was now growing into rather a disreputable quarter, inhabited by thieves, and cutpurses, and ill doers of all sorts, besides debtors trying to hide from their creditors; and very unpleasant neighbours they were proving themselves for the dwellers beyond, in the Temple inclosure, which stretched from Fleet Street right down to the riverside.

For quite three hundred years this inclosure had been occupied by the warlike monks called the Knights Templars; and still you can turn aside, as Edward Coke and his companion now did, out of the hum and bustle of crowded Fleet Street, and see the grey old Temple Church with its "round", as the westward tower is called, and the tombstones in the graveyard below, carved from end to end with their stone crosses; and so descending the worn steps, enter the grand old church, where, stretched on their marble monuments, lie the crossed-legged knights of St. John clasping their swords to their mail-clad breasts, and their long pointed shields beside them.

"I thought you were a Templar, Master Edward," said John, after he had gazed long and earnestly all round him, and cast more than one puzzled look from the stern stone warriors, to the sober black doublet and student's cap of his friend.

"Ay, one though of another colour," said Coke; and then he explained to John how the English crusading knights, who went to defend the Temple from the infidel Saracens in the Holy Land, lived together in one vast brotherhood, and how one of their chief houses had been built on this piece of ground just outside the walls of London. But the knights were all dust, and their good swords rust now, as Edward Coke said, and their property was all passed over into the hands of learned scholars, and lawyers, and young students of the law, such as he himself was; and yonder, not a hundred yards off, the young man said, were his chambers in the Middle Temple. "But let us go round now by the gardens," he added; and then he led the way beneath some tall elms, into a large garden, gay with early summer flowers, and whose smooth lawns and grassy banks sloped down to the clear water,

upon whose gleaming bosom stately swans glided to and fro in the midst of a smaller fry of ducks and geese.

At the top of a broad stone flight of steps, whose base was washed by the river wavelets, Edward Coke paused and hailed a waterman plying in his boat, on the watch for the first customer who should appear. The man paddled up alongside, and the two got into the boat, Shock waiting for no invitation, having preceded them with a flying leap over her bows, while Coke bade the man row for Westminster stairs, and John Pennycuick seated himself, gazing in wonder and admiration upon the scene. To one side of him stretched the fair, gently sloping meadows, dotted here and there with manors, and farmhouses, and churches; to the other side lay the Strand, as Coke said it was called, because it fringed the river; and here amid the tall trees and beautiful gardens, rose noblemen's mansions—my lords of Essex, and of Suffolk, and the proud Duke of Somerset, and many others. From the broad terraces overhanging the water, ran flights of stone and marble steps, whence people embarked for their journeyings up and down

the river; for as yet wheel carriages were scarce things, and in London, travelling and trading too were carried on chiefly by water.

The boat sped on, and in a very little while they had reached the bend of the river by York Place, my Lord Cardinal Wolsey's splendid gift to Bluff King Hal. From there, Coke pointed across to the opposite bank a little farther down, to a group of red and grey buildings, and told John Pennycuick there lay Lambeth Palace and church, and that the huge square tower beside it was called the Lollards' Tower. There, so it was said, a great many Lollards, as the followers of John Wycliffe were called, had been imprisoned and cruelly treated; and still you might see in its upper room the staples and chains which had been used for binding them. "Though," said Coke, "for all I am, as you know right well, John, a staunch friend to all the reform and cleansing our church has gone through, I would not have you receive the tale for gospel truth, since there are some who say it was not so."

"Ay, ay!" said John, "but even in Swaffham I have heard it."

To see the manner in which Shock behaved himself, really one would have imagined he had been born and bred within sound of Bow bells. He was not in the least overwhelmed by the bustle and stir around him, and made himself quite at home—but then home for Shock meant beside his master wheresoever that might be; and now he jumped out of the boat as fast as he had jumped in, and trotted along the wooden landing stage to the river bank, followed by his two friends, until in a few moments the three stood on the open space before Westminster Hall.

“’Tis for all the world like I saw it in the peepshow,” said John, stepping a pace back to obtain a good look of its broad entry before they went in, “except that my Lord Mayor is not driving up just this moment in his gold coach. Think of it though, Master Coke. What luck for the little barefoot beggar lad! All along of a cat too!”

“Almost as strange,” said Coke with a sly smile, as he lifted his cap in answer to the greetings of several grave-looking black-robed gentlemen who were hurrying about the vast flagged hall loaded with bundles of papers and

parchments—"as strange almost, I doubt, as one I wot of, who came up to London with his dog."

"You always will have your jest, Master Edward," said the pedlar, smiling too; "but I doubt I may whistle long enough before they make Lord Mayor of me, once—let alone thrice."

"I would not regret that, John. There may be still greater luck in store for you. For my Lord Mayor's life is not, mind you, entirely a bed of roses, or all cakes and ale, as Master Shakspeare has it. But come, let us be moving, for before we turn homeward you must take a peep at the abbey, even if you do no more, and I doubt you'll sleep soundly to-night."

Truth to confess, John was already yawning. The grandeur, however, of the glorious old abbey gave him a fresh spell of wakefulness, and full of awe and wonder he followed Coke through its dim aisles, and gazed on the monuments of marble and gilded alabaster covering the last resting-places of England's kings and queens and mighty ones. Then, too, how lovely he thought the painted windows illumined by the afternoon sun. "If I must be remembered

when I'm dead," he said, after they had walked in silence till they came by the tilt-yard through Spring Garden, "I know not whether I would better care for it to be by one of yonder fair red and blue and yellow windows, or by the graving of my image in wood or stone. Only this I know, that painted or graven, I would have Shock beside me, and parted never, just as we lived and breathed. And do you know, Master Coke, I think I have some such fancy, though it may be a vain and foolish one, for I know I am but a humble man, but when I'm gone, I would fain care to be kindly remembered. Yonder again is some such memorial, is it not?" he added, looking with admiring eyes at a beautiful lofty structure of carven stone just in front of them, surmounted by a cross, and in whose niche stood the crowned and gracious figure of a woman in flowing robes.

"That is Charing Cross," answered Coke. "It stands upon the spot where the bier of good Queen Eleanor, our King Edward the First's wife, last rested, ere she was laid in the abbey. Some say this spot was named after this '*Chère Reine*', which is the French for '*Dear Queen*', and called the village of

Chère Reine, or Charing, as the words fell into."

"'Tis a mighty big village!" said John, looking round at the tall mansions, and the people walking this way and that way, some bound for the fields round Westminster, others up by the meadows towards Convent Garden or Tyburn, and the greater number along the Strand, where, to his astonishment, John found he was once more, and in a short time Coke pointed out to him the spot in Fleet Street whence they had turned down to the river; though now he was able to show him Temple Bar, which as yet, however, was not so very much of a sight, being only a wooden building where the road toll was collected.

The clocks were striking five, and the red and golden rays of the setting sun lit up the towers and roofs of the great city, as Coke and John Pennycuick rested and supped together in Coke's own quiet shady chamber, whose deep windows overlooked the Thames, and caught a glimpse of the Temple Gardens. John, however, was readier for bed than eating. He had been up since dawn, and afoot almost all the day; and despite his politest efforts, he

kept yawning like a cavern's mouth, and began to cast about in his mind where he should be finding a night's lodging. Coke, who divined his thoughts, very soon came to his help. "If you have not yet put up anywhere," he said, "I will take you to a snug hostelry across yonder in Gunpowder Alley, where I'll answer for it you shall rest quiet enough."

"Ay, ay," said John, opening his sleepy eyes with a jerk, for he did not take very kindly to the name of the place, "and not waken again."

"No fear for that," answered Coke, bursting into a laugh of amusement at his guest's startled face. "God willing, you shall be roused betimes to-morrow by mine host himself for your errand to London Bridge. But first he shall take you to the Tower, where the lions shall bid Shock a welcome; though I would warn him from making too near acquaintance with their majesties. I would like to go with you myself, but I have an appointment which will keep me at home till dinner-time, when we will meet again at the Castle."

"With all my heart, though I would not be burdensome to you, Master Edward," said

John, rising and following Coke, who led the way amid the precincts of the Temple, coming to a narrow lane of clean and tidy-looking houses, above whose doors and windows hung signs of every sort and size. Here a barber's pole, there a huge outspread hand, or a golden lamb above a glover's or a mercer's. Next door, marking a furrier's, the picture of a leopard swinging in its wrought-iron frame, and just beyond, on the opposite side of the way, a droll picture of a huge cat, who was sitting, spectacles on nose and bow in hand, fiddling away on a violin almost as big as itself.

"There is the 'Cat and Fiddle'," said Coke, pointing to the house to which the sign belonged—"the inn of which I spoke to you;" and so saying he entered. "Give you good evening, mistress," he said, greeting the landlady, who approached from the kitchen at sight of the newcomers. "I bring you a guest, an old friend of mine from Norfolk who has business in London, and desires a lodging with you."

"You are welcome, sir, to the 'Cat and Fiddle'," said the hostess.

“And my dog here?” inquired John, pointing to Shock, for where Shock was not welcome could be no abiding-place for John.

“I’ll warrant,” smiled the hostess, stroking the dog’s head, “he’s a well enough conducted dog, being known to Master Coke; and will put neither cat nor fiddle out of tune. Will it please you to walk in, master?”

And then bidding them all good-night, Coke put best foot foremost back to the Temple Gardens, where it was his custom in those light spring evenings to attend the “Motes”, as the meetings were called, which were held by the Temple students for discussing questions concerning their profession, and at which Coke, young as he was, had already greatly distinguished himself.

CHAPTER X

AT THE TOWER

DESPITE his weariness, John Pennycuick slept soundly in the comfortable bedchamber at the “Cat and Fiddle”. Once and again, it is true, he started up in affright at the clatter of some

cart or chariot trundling over the cobble stones in the street below; and Shock startled the other folks in the house, once or twice, by his loud barks at sounds so new to him; but he soon became indifferent, and curled round for good and all to a comfortable night's rest, and indeed, before St. Dunstan's clock had struck nine, all was still.

By seven o'clock next morning, and a terribly late hour it was, too, for John Pennycuick, he was up and dressed, taking his breakfast in the guest-room of the inn. He had got it under some difficulty, for a draught of milk usually composed the meal for him; and though the landlord of the "Cat and Fiddle" had shrugged his shoulders a bit when John asked for the milk, he had ordered the maid-servant to bring the gentleman what he desired. When, however, John looked into the mug of thick bluish-white liquid, he shuddered at the notion of swallowing it. As for Shock, when John put a little pannikin of the stuff for him on the floor, he just sniffed at it, and turned away in contempt, leaving it untouched. Then, having put a safe distance between it and himself, he turned and looked up inquiringly at John, with

jaw apart and quivering lips, while John took just one sip of it, very gingerly indeed.

"By your leave, young mistress," he said then, "what do you call this?"

"What do I call it?" pertly echoed the girl. "Milk, to be sure. And very good milk too, I doubt."

"So do I," said John, quietly setting it on one side. "Will it please you to bring me instead a jug of small beer? And my dog, I take it, will be vastly beholden to you, if so be you'll give him a drink of pure water, for he's a rare plain, honest fellow, who never can abide make-believes of any shape or sort."

The girl pursed up her cherry lips for a moment, then they broke out into a smile, and she brought Shock not only his pannikin of water, but also a huge rib-bone of beef, well covered here and there with dainty bits. Of this Shock made short work, crunching it up as if it were no more than a bit of Jew's Pass-over cake, and licking his lips from time to time, and looking at John with eyes which said as plainly as possible, that he considered that saying about "the nearer the bone, the sweeter the meat" a perfectly true one.

Then, in company with his host, John Penny-cuick sallied forth, much by the way he and Coke had come on the previous day, only that his guide took him round by Newgate to show him Christ Church playground, where the blue-coat boys were at their games before going into school; and so, crossing the road, the two found themselves in Cheapside.

"I warrant," said John, gazing all round him, "'twould take half a lifetime to find your way about London fairly. Are we near London Bridge yet? I can see nothing of it."

"'Tis a goodish way still. Besides, we are first for the Tower, and must take a bit of a round;" and his companion led him on through Lombard Street, where the golden ball signs above the jewellers and money-changers greatly interested him, and made him think of his apple tree at home.

"This is Gracious Street," said his guide; and then going on a little farther, John beheld the Tower of London.

"'Tis a mighty fine building, to be sure," said John, as they came nearer and nearer its massive grey-white walls; "but——"

“Well?” said the host of the “Cat and Fiddle”, with a curious smile.

“Well, I would rather sleep in your snug room at the ‘Cat and Fiddle’, were my choice given me, or say in my little cottage at Swaffham, where I live when I’m at home, than in the finest chamber inside yonder palace—for ’tis one, is it not?”

“Palace or prison,” answered the other, with a little shrug, “as you best please to call it; for ’tis both, and there is more than one sleeping inside its walls, whose choice has not been asked; and would fain, if he could, be a hundred miles away.”

“Yon fine fellows not excepted, eh?” said John, as the keeper conducted them into the presence of the splendid beasts. “Truly they are right noble creatures; but to my thinking they look sad, and as if they would rarely like to take a tramp and a roar through the forests they came from; but I doubt the roar’s all out of them this many a year.”

In that, however, John was mistaken, for hardly were the words out of his mouth, than one of the royal beasts set up such a roar as seemed to shake the walls of the moat to their

very foundations. For the moment the noise so confounded Shock, that he stood stockstill as any stone, but the next minute he recovered himself, and fell to barking so noisily, that the confusion and uproar were maddening, and the visitors were glad to beat a hasty retreat, never stopping till they were well out on to Fish Street Hill.

"Yonder's London Bridge," said the host of the "Cat and Fiddle" then.

But John Pennycuick, looking straight before him, saw what looked like a chain of houses stretching in mid-air across the river to the green banks on the other side, where it was lost in a large group of beautiful church-like buildings.

"I see no bridge," said John, straining his eyes up and down the river.

"That is because 'tis covered with houses," answered his guide; "but you've only to follow this road half a hundred yards, and you'll be upon it, before you know where you are."

"Why, in that case I thank you for your kindness in bringing me so far, and will find my way now alone," said John, who could see

his guide was anxious to be home again. So they parted, John and Shock walking on. As, however, he neared the bridge he was compelled to stand still and collect himself—for his brain had grown dizzy with the towering height of the buildings around him, and almost meeting overhead, the way was so narrow. He was confused, too, by the noise of the water rushing through the arches beneath, and by the clamour of the apprentices at the booth doors crying their wares, and the hurrying throng of foot passengers, some bound for London, almost as many for Southwark and Bankside, where stood just at the bridge foot, the grand old church of Saint Mary Overy and the palace of my Lord Bishop of Winchester, with the bear-baiting and the bull-baiting grounds beyond.

Even Shock seemed overcome by the confusion, far more than he had been by the roaring of the lions, and walked steadily to heel. This, however, did not save either him or his master from a good many hard words, as they steered on through the human stream, for their awkward ways of doing it.

“Now then, greenhorn!” yelled one, “can’t

you see where you and your brute are shoving to?"

"In faith! the Cockney fellow has hit it there," muttered John, rubbing his arm as the other pushed by. "How can I see, I would like to know, when these houses block up every yard before you?"

Still he pushed on, determined to see the end of it.

CHAPTER XI

LONDON BRIDGE

JOHN had not gone much farther, before his patience was rewarded by arriving at an open space which allowed him to see both ways of the river from the parapets. One glance over the edge of them, however, more than sufficed him, for his brain flew round like mill-wheels as he saw the water swirling in white foam past the broad flat wooden piles upon which the piers of the bridge-spans rested, and listened to the bawling and cries of the boatmen shooting the arches, which he mistook for the shrieks of so many drowning wretches. So very frequently,

indeed, fearful accidents did occur in those whirling waters, that the boatmen were accustomed to give a shout of triumph at having passed the dangers, as they glided again into smooth water.

John Pennycuick was not sorry when once more the sounds were deadened by the walls of the chapel of Saint Thomas à Becket, which stood midway upon the bridge. A few steps farther brought him in front of a huge mansion or palace, whose turreted tops seemed to touch the sky, and whose walls, reaching from side to side of the bridge, were gilded and carved all over, and pierced with windows whose panes sparkled in the sunlight.

"What building is that, friend?" enquired John of someone passing, but without removing his hands with which he was shading his dazzled eyes from the glare while he looked.

"Nonsuch House," answered the person thus addressed.

"Ay, and a good thing too," said John, more to himself than to his informant; "for I doubt few would be for living inside such gilt gingerbread walls; anyhow atop of this place, where they might get blown over into this howling

flood the first time the wind was for a frolic. Give me my cottage at home." He walked on through the arches running under the mansion, to find himself upon a drawbridge, which shook so alarmingly beneath his weight, that he hurried on in a panic. His courage rose again, however, as now he found himself close to the end of the bridge, gazing up at the beautiful gateway guarding it. But how it sank again in creepy horror, as well it might, when amid the battlements crowning the walls, he perceived a double row of tall spikes each bearing a ghastly human head, some mere skulls, others looking as if they had been but set there yesterday.

Sickened by the sight, John Pennycuick turned away and hastily retraced his steps. Then, indeed, he thought longingly of his peaceful home, and for a good while he felt as if he must run, and never stop till he found himself there safe once more. Perhaps he would have begun to do so, if he had not suddenly remembered his appointment with Coke at the Castle for eleven o'clock, and already the clocks were striking half-past ten.

"I know not what joyful news some may hear in this great city," said John, when once

more they sat at dinner together; "for my part I have heard none. But, I trow, every one may see sad sights and shameful ones."

"Come, come, man, never take it to heart like that," said Coke, when he had heard John's tale of what he had seen on London Bridge gate. "And when you go to-morrow, keep the London end of the Bridge, then you won't see the other end."

"I warrant I will, if I go, for I would sooner pay down a score of pounds than see that sight again."

"If you go?" said Coke.

"Ay, for I doubt 'tis a fool's errand."

"Nay, you would never give in so," said Coke. "Faint heart never wins. Besides, you shall not go back to Swaffham, and say you saw not all London had to show worth seeing."

"I'm tired," said John rather sulkily.

"Why, then, we'll sit here and take it quietly," said Coke good-humouredly, "and enjoy the merry quips of Dick Tarleton, who is mine host of this inn."

John's face brightened a little in spite of himself. Was it possible he should see this

merry fellow, this talk of every town and village in the kingdom—the famous author of the famous "*Book of Jests*", which kept all who read it in a roar? And not a morsel more could John swallow, so eager was he for Dick's entry.

The little man came in when the tables were cleared, to the music of a pipe and tabor played upon by himself. The very look of him was enough to make anybody laugh. His face was such an odd mixture of ugliness and of comic intelligence. His nose, for one thing, was broken and flattened by an accident, but that had been a very fortunate mishap for Dick, since it added to the droll expression of his face. He had his jest for everybody, and at a great many, hitting some rather hard, but received mostly in good part. He took a vast fancy for Shock, who wagged his tail and barked in return. "What will you sell him for, master?" quoth Dick of John.

"Not all your wit, Master Jester," replied John.

"Then you hold him dear?"

"As my own life," said John.

The answer seemed to please the little man,

and he tuned up, and sang the merriest ditty John ever heard in all his days.

“When and I was but a little tiny boy—
With a hey ho—the wind and the rain.”

Somehow so it ran, and all the while Dick sang, he drummed and danced, and blew in between times on his fife, in such a merry manner, that it made the saddest hearts present merry too, and John laughed till he cried, and went home again to the “Cat and Fiddle” with a light heart.

Whether he no longer saw London through such smoked spectacles as he had done the day before, it is quite certain that next morning he reconsidered his resolve to hurry home again; and after breakfast, which he was careful should be like yesterday’s, of a draught of small beer, and the maid of the inn took care to find Shock another beef bone, he set out again for London Bridge, asking no guide this time, for John was getting quite a Londoner, and was perfectly able to tell you Lambeth Palace from the Tower of London, and Paul’s Cross from the one in Chepe.

Not a creature, however, appeared to give

him the least shred of joyful news, though he hung about the best part of the day on the bridge, taking up his stand by the parapet looking towards Westminster, between the first block of houses and Saint Thomas's chapel, hardly budging from his standpoint, even when a smartishly attired man, who was passing, bade him stand out of the way, and make room for his betters.

"Why beshrew me," airily smiled this individual to himself, "if that isn't the same fellow who was gaping up at Nonsuch House yesterday. If I meet him again—and London's not so big after all but I might—I'll give him a piece of my mind. If it didn't look so remarkable," continued the man, who was always under the impression that the world was occupied in nothing but watching him, "I would vastly like to go back, and amuse myself with the varlet again." Feeling that, however, to be so utterly out of the question, he just walked straight on to his own house, which stood upon the bridge. Gossips will be gossips, and some of this person's neighbours said that if he had lived more at home than he did, instead of promenading the streets all day, and pretending

to be a grand gentleman, it would have been better for the trade in feathers and lace that he was supposed to drive, or rather did drive in his idle, left-handed fashion. His chief effort in life was to look a gay sparkish gentleman, and that he did not succeed in. He never, somehow, quite managed the proper tilt of his smart little velvet cap, and only looked a vulgar upstart.

Disappointed and jaded, John Pennycuick was beginning to think about returning to the "Cat and Fiddle", when he saw the tall figure of Coke approaching through the narrow way. "I thought I should find you here," he said, as he came up and laid his hand on John's shoulders.

"Ay, but please Heaven," said Pennycuick snappishly, "this time to-morrow shall not find me kicking my heels here for the Jack-a-dreams I've been. Not a word of joyful news have I heard, Master Edward."

"No?"

"Not the ghost of any."

"Then I've some for you. Look yonder," and Coke pointed towards the huge round building on the farthestmost bank beyond St.

Mary Overy church. "That is the Globe Theatre; and this day, as good luck has brought it about, there will be played in it, Master Shakspeare's tragedy of Julius Cæsar, with Dick Burbage and good Master Ned Alleyne for Brutus and Cassius. What say you to that?"

"Nay, Brutus and Cassius are fine gentlemen enough, I make no doubt, Master Edward, since you seem to set such store by them, and Master Burbage and Master Alleyne too, but I'm for Swaffham this very afternoon," answered John.

"You are no such thing, you faint-hearted fellow," said Coke, who was brimming over with delight. "'How poor is he who has not patience!'"

"Those are good words," said John, looking up. "Who made them?"

"The same who makes many more as good, which you shall hear Brutus and Cassius say this afternoon; and do it you must," added Coke, linking his arm in John Pennycuick's, "for I'll take no refusal. Return home to-morrow, if you're bent on it, but go with me now."

Before John rightly knew where he was going, he was at the end of the bridge, and then he had no choice but to let himself be hurried on, for fear he should again catch sight of the terrible spikes above the gate; though he was careful to shut his eyes fast, and hardly opened them again till he was inside the playhouse, and they rested on the vast multitude assembled to see the performance.

What John thought of it, and all he saw there, would fill a volume to tell. The memory of it lived for him all the rest of his days. And Swaffham no more tired of hearing, than he of telling, how Brutus killed Cæsar in the Capitol.

CHAPTER XII

MR. BADGER'S ADVICE

JOHN PENNYCUICK's heart was, however, as heavy as ever when he awoke next morning. He felt thoroughly miserable, and displeased with himself. London was, of course, a mighty fine city, and it would be sore ingratitude to Coke, who had devoted so much of his precious

leisure to showing him its sights, to say he had not had a pleasant time. Still, somehow, John felt very homesick. It made him wretched to think a hundred miles lay between him and his little cottage, and the fowls, and the old orchard. He seemed to have been away a twelvemonth instead of only a week. Then again, John felt, if not quite ashamed, still anything but proud of what he had done. "When and he was but a little tiny boy", as merry Dick Tarleton had it, a roguish neighbour had sent him one first of April, to the other end of Swaffham, where the farrier lived, for "a pennyworth of stirrup oil", and the farrier had given him for his pains, a smartish cut with a leathern strap, and bidden him go back again for an April fool; and now John felt as much as possible like he felt when the farrier gave him that "stirrup oil". To think that such a shrewd common-sense fellow as he accounted himself, and Swaffham said he was, should have started on such a wild-goose chase! Why, if Swaffham should ever get at the truth of it, how would he be able to hold up his head there again? Pondering all the while in this fashion, John looked up from the tavern window at the

narrow strip of sky overhead, or rather cloud, for it was murky enough, and a drizzle of rain was falling, just enough to make it slippery and chilly under foot.

"Now," thought John, "shall I make a little more of an ass of myself than I have been already, by going once more to the bridge, or shall we start this very hour for home again; eh, Shock?"

Shock looked wise, but offered no word of advice.

"If I could go now and bid farewell to Master Coke," continued John to himself, "I would not think twice about it; but he said he should be at Westminster by seven, and now 'tis half-past; and how late before he was back, he could not tell. Well, well," he went on, cheering up a little, "London Bridge is as good as anywhere else, and better than moping like a mouse in Master Puss's trap here; and the third time's always lucky. So say the idiots who believe in charms, and—and—and dreams, and the rest of it."

Then, with a grim smile at his own foolishness, John started for the last time on his quest.

It took him longer than it had done the two times before, for he was tired heart and foot. But he got there at last, and just as he arrived at the open space between the houses, the clouds cleared, the drizzle ceased, and the sun broke out, shedding his radiance over the housetops, and church spires, and the soft spring greenness of the Southwark meadows, and glinting on the tapering masts of the ships and the ripples of the river, till it sparkled like diamonds, save where it gleamed on the rush of water foaming over the wooden platforms supporting the piers of the bridge, and made it look like shoals of pearls. Half in affright at the mad rush, and yet somehow compelled to look at it, John stood leaning over the parapet to watch the boats shooting the arches, and setting his teeth in breathless suspense, as now one, now another darted past. So deafening was the roar below, that he only indistinctly heard some voice, which suddenly bawled in his ear. "Star-gazing?" said the voice, or rather, John thought it said so.

"Why, hardly!" replied John, blinking dazedly at the speaker, as he turned round. "London is a queer place, to be sure; but

the stars haven't come to being in the water, where I was looking."

"Starlings, I said!" shouted the individual louder than ever.

"Nor starlings either," snapped John, who was in no mood for jesting.

"Ours do," quietly rejoined the stranger. "They call those starlings, those great wooden platforms the bridge arches stand on."

"Oh, do they!" said John, looking hard at the man. "Now you speak plain; though I don't feel ready to take your word for it. A man rarely is over and above inclined for that with another who's once tried to make a laughing-stock of him. You're the gentleman, if I'm not sorely out, who three days ago bade me go dine with Duke Humphrey."

"Oh, is that so?" muttered the man, colouring. "Well, well, you see, friend," he added aloud, "the wit will out, when the brain is full of it."

"Sorry sort of wit, I take it, to treat a stranger to, and a hungry one to boot, as I was," said John. "Lucky for me I found wit of another colour, to tell me the trick you had played me."

"Come, come, never be so nasty as all that, friend. If I had my little jest with you then, I told you gospel truth yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"Dear, dear, hark to that now!" affectedly cried the stranger. "Feigning not to remember he spoke with me, and here too, as it were—close on this very spot!"

"In faith, 'tis no pretence," said John earnestly; "I remember nothing of you."

"Not of the gentleman in the sky-blue doublet, slashed with salmon-colour taffety, of whom you enquired the name of yonder mansion?" and the stranger waved his embroidered glove towards Nonsuch House.

"Eh, eh! to be sure I remember asking it of someone who went by me, but he might have been a walking finger-post, for aught I saw of him. My gaze was all fixed on the house."

"And what think you of it, friend?" enquired the stranger, when he had disposed of his contempt for John's great lack of oversight.

"Why, 'tis smart enough, but I would sooner have my cottage walls round me of

a blowy night, and solid ground, than its gimcrackery all in the middle here o' the stream like."

"Oh, but 'tis safely enough pegged together."

"Pegged!" cried John in amazed horror.

"Ay, 'twas brought over from Holland piecemeal, and then set together with pegs."

"Like any urchin's toy out of a puzzle-box!" shuddered John. "No, no, that I'll never believe. You're poking your fun at me again."

"Not I."

"Marry then, 'tis a double-Dutch concern indeed. Well, give me snug before smart, the shirt before the frill. None such houses for me, Master——"

"Badger, that is my name," said the stranger. "Algernon Francis Trevelyan——"

"Oh, Badger's enough," said John, with a very slight yawn, "and to spare, not to say."

"You're a merry fellow, whoever you are," said Badger, not sure whether he should smile, or look dignified.

Feeling far from merry, and being truthful, the pedlar was silent, and looked up and

down the bridge, as if he might be expecting somebody.

“What’s your business?” enquired Algeron Francis Trevelyan Badger, gazing with growing curiosity at John Pennycuick.

“I haven’t any, speaking rightly; not hereabouts.”

“Where do you come from?”

“The country.”

“The biggest dunce might guess that, I doubt,” said Badger.

“Then why did you ask, friend?”

“Have you nothing to sell?”

“Not with me now. Have you?”

“Do I look like a—anything of the kind?” said Badger loftily. “What do you take me for?”

“I’ll stake my head if I can guess. You look neither fish, flesh, nor fowl—fine gentleman, copper-captain, nor shopkeeper, to my thinking.”

“No, I’m rarely taken for a tradesperson; but I am,” said Mr. Badger with an engaging smile. “I don’t mind telling you so. That’s my house,” he continued, pointing to a large, but ill-kept, shabby-looking house near where

they stood, over whose door swung the picture of a gaudily painted popinjay. "I do business in feathers and lace for her gracious Majesty and the court."

"And a good business too, I make no doubt," said John.

"Well, so so," said Badger. "It might be better."

"'Twould be a poor one enough where I come from. The demand there's all for kersey and broadcloth. We country folks leave the feathers on the backs they were made for; and mighty pretty they look too," wistfully added John. "You should just see our herons, and kingfishers, and wagtails, and bustards, and robin redbreasts. I wouldn't give a single one of them for a flight of your painted London popinjays."

"If you're so fond of the country," said Badger, growing affronted, "what in the name of fortune brought you to London?"

"Why, that's just where 'tis," replied John. "Before I came away, Master Popinjay, I had a dream, you see."

"Absolutely," said the other, affecting to yawn. "How interesting!"

"The dream said, that if I came up to London, and stood upon London Bridge here, I should hear joyful news."

"And you have been such a double-dyed idiot, as to take such a journey on such an errand?"

"Why, to own the truth," answered John sadly, "that is what I have done."

"I couldn't have believed it," said Badger, "for you don't look altogether a madman. But there, I suppose the cleverest country clod is but a greenhorn. How thankful it does make one to have been born in London! Why, you can't have as much wit as your own dog there," he added, pointing to Shock, who sat patiently waiting to be off.

"Pretty much the same, I doubt," said John. "Shock 'knows a hawk from a hand-saw', as the saying goes, or an owl from—a popinjay."

"But, my good friend, seriously—Ha h'm. Now I had a dream last night, for example."

"Had you now?" said John.

"Yes. I dreamed I was at a place called—stop, what was its name? ay, Swaffham, to be sure, Swaffham."



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"DIGGING," SAID BADGER, SCARCELY ABLE TO
SPEAK FOR LAUGHTER

"Hey!" said John.

"Swaffham, I tell you. Did you ever know such a funny word? A place I never heard of. Nor nobody else either, I doubt. Swaffham. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" echoed John. "How vastly entertaining! And your Swaffham, where might it be? In Yorkshire, or Cornwall, or——"

"Oh, in Norfolk, so please you. Laughable! ludicrous! incredible! absurd! wasn't it? Norfolk—a flat, dreary swamp of a place, I suppose, no one could live in but its native bumpkins, who are as brainless as their own red herrings. What the mischief should I do in Norfolk, or Swaffham either?"

"No, to be sure not. But what were you doing, if I may make so bold?" said John.

"Digging," answered Badger, scarcely able to speak for laughter, and spreading out his beringed milk-white hands. "Digging, by the lord Harry—digging for dear life under an old apple tree, which stood in an orchard behind a pedlar's house. Ay, you may well stare and open your mouth. What do you say to that for a dream?"

But John, having closed his mouth directly he discovered it was open, said nothing.

"Well," continued Badger, "and there I stood, spade in hand, a thing I've hardly so much as seen in my life, much more fingered."

"Oh, fingering would be no good; a spade's a spade; and wants handling accordingly."

"Well, there I was, I tell you, dig-dig-digging, because methought there, deep down in the ground, I was to comè upon a mighty mass of treasure."

"Strange!" murmured John. "Strange indeed! And did you find it?" he added.

"Alack! I awoke before I lighted on it," said Badger, with a laugh of mock regret. "And, truly, I can tell you, for the moment I was disappointed. It all seemed so real. And I shouldn't be flinging money over this parapet here—I don't mind telling you that—if it did come my way just now. It's frightfully scarce. If fine feathers make fine birds, they don't always make fat ones. If I had a few pounds to spare just now, my tailor would teach me what to be doing with them.

But what can a gentleman do, he must dress?"

"Why, that's true," agreed John, his thoughts miles away.

"But as I was saying," went on Badger, "am I so unwise, think you, as to undertake so long a journey on the strength of a foolish dream? No thank you, not exactly."

"Sha'n't you go and try?"

"Sha'n't I go and try?" mocked Badger. "Hear the fellow! Far be such folly from me. And listen to me, honest countryman, be advised. Never be you fooled by dreams again. Do not spend precious time in the hope of an idle dream coming true. You'll make haste home as fast as your legs can carry you, if you take my advice."

"Why, so I will, and thank you for't," said John. "Fare you well, Master Popinjay!"

"Adieu, Friend Countryman!"

And ere Master Algernon Francis Trevelyan Badger had time to wave a graceful farewell with his glove, the pedlar and his dog were out of sight.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TREASURE TROVE

To say that John Pennycuick did not stop till he reached Swaffham, would not be true to the letter; but he made all the haste he could make, only returning to the "Cat and Fiddle" to settle his reckoning, and to beg his worthy hostess to send a messenger to Edward Coke's chambers, and leave word that he had been called home on sudden business that allowed no delay. Then bidding the people of the inn farewell, he went out into the yard, where stood a wagoner just mounting behind a handsome team, who was saying in a merry voice that he and his load would be by supper-time at St. Alban's. That sort of travelling John thought would just be the thing for him; and begging a place atop of his sacks for himself, and for Shock when he should be inclined for a lift, away they thundered over the cobble stones, and over Hampstead and Enfield, where from the Chase the spires and roofs of London gradually faded from John's eyes, though

from his memory he felt they never would fade.

Things at Swaffham were not much changed, though John Pennycuick had been nearly a fortnight away. The geese were still cackling and dabbling in the green slush of the market-gutter; the women gossiping, basket on arm, at the street corners. The men, scythe and pitchfork on shoulders, were tramping home, and greeted him and Shock with a pleasant nod and a "Welcome back to ye both"; for there were few, indeed, but had a good word for the pedlar and his dog.

Arrived at his cottage at last, the first thing John thought of, was his pack. Well, there it lay, safe and sound as he had left it. Then he paid a visit to the chickens; they flew to meet the two wanderers with joyful clucks—but the old dame had royally kept her word, for they looked as plump and in good case as heart could desire.

"Well, well, London was a fine place, to be sure," John thought to himself, as he laid aside his Sunday clothes and slipped into his old jerkin again, "but home is home;" and then in the glow of the waning sun he

took a turn round his acre. It never looked more flourishing. The rain had well moistened the ground, whose fragrance mingled with the sweet scent of the flowers, and these one could almost see grow as one looked.

Then, lifting the latch of the wicket, he passed on into the orchard. Some change was there, for the fair pink and white blossom was entirely fallen, leaving behind a splendid promise of fruit. "I trow," he murmured to himself, as he drew down a bough of the old apple tree and inspected the tiny germs of fruit, scarce bigger than seed pearls, "Master Edward's apples will be brave good eating." Then he fell back a few paces, and looked at the tree for a long time with thoughtful eyes.

To be sure it was a strange thing to look at; and you might do so till you could fancy it had sense, and was in some way human. Its branches had become twisted and knotted by age into a hundred queer shapes. Why, the very one he had drawn down to look at was bent in the middle like the elbow of a bony arm clothed in a loose green velvet sleeve, and there, splayed out at the end for

all the world like fingers, was a cluster of branchlets, of which one crooked and pointed downwards to the turf beneath. And then—to think what things trees are! How came it he had never noticed it till that moment? Plain as could be, in the rugged and knotted trunk of the tree, halfway up, just beneath where it forked into the lowermost branches, there was a man's face. Nose—lips which had lost a tooth or two, to be sure, but, nevertheless, smiled very agreeably; brow that was partly concealed by a peaked cap, or still more like a hood such as the monks used to wear; but the eyes were the most curious part of all. They looked John Pennycuick full in the face with a kind of serious, and yet good-humoured twitch of the eyelids, something like a wink, and yet too grave for a wink.

How well John seemed to know the expression of that tree-face! Where had he seen it before? Or when? Why, now he remembered—where, but in the picture-gallery at Mileham. It was Father Gengulphus' face over again, just a little distorted and awry; but Father Gengulphus, as sure as Shock

was Shock. Well, it might have been fancy, of course; what else could it be? But John enjoyed his fancy very much; and there he leaned against the fence, gazing and gazing first at the face, and then at the arm and its pointing finger, and then again at the face, which stood out clearer and clearer as the sun set, and a faint ray of the young May moon's light mingled with the on-creeping shadows, and fell across the trunk of the tree. And so as he looked, there came back upon him the memory of what that stranger had said to him on London Bridge. Not, indeed, that he had in any way forgotten it; and next morning he intended to examine every tree in the orchard thoroughly well, in order to see if they would afford him any sort of clue to the secret; but in the meantime——

“Shock! beshrew thee, thou varlet!” For Shock, finding time perhaps hanging a bit heavy on his paws, was beginning to put them to use in the old fashion, and was bringing tooth and nail to their help. “Shock!” shouted the pedlar, but never a whit minded Shock. There he went on, tearing and scratching with every leg of his body, send-

ing the loosened turf flying on all sides of him, and uttering all the time a low eager cry between a whine and a bark, and gazing now and again with appealing eyes at his master, as if he would say, "Come, and help. Why won't you come?"

"Shock, what is it then, old dog? What is it?" And then John, struck by the pertinacity and beseeching earnestness of his faithful friend, hesitated no longer, but tore off his jerkin, turned up his shirt-sleeves, and fetching his spade and pickaxe, began to help Shock with all his might.

All round the twilight deepened, but the moon shone dazzlingly clear, and helped John Pennycuick to his task; and long before it faded, his spade struck on something hard, and John's finger-tips tingled to the stroke. Well, perhaps it was some clod of hardened earth, or a big stone. Not so—harder than earth—softer than flint ever would be; it was wood, and nothing else but wood. It gave back a hollow sound, as if it was answering to the blow, though for a long time it would not budge, it was wedged so fast into the earth.

There, however, it lay—a box indeed, of

some size, and flat at the top, upon which John could see, as the flood of light fell deep down into the hole, were written some words in fair-sized characters; but damp and mildew had made these dim, and neither John nor Shock with all his wisdom was able to make head or tail of them. There was no help for it, but first to shovel the ground well away all round, and lift the box sheer out. This was a work of some difficulty, for it was as heavy as a lump of metal. That, however, was partly to be explained by the iron bands with which it was clamped. At last John's groping fingers ran into a ring fixed in the lid, and then, giving it one jerk, out it came.

"So ho!" said John with a sigh of relief. "At last, eh?" and then with the box in his hand, he looked up, for he thought he heard a rustling in the branches overhead, and a low laugh. "Hoo! hoo! hoo!" and out sprang an owl. And then a frog somewhere in the grass croaked out, in a way that sounded so impertinent and prying, and so exactly like his own name, that without more ado he hoisted the box well up in his arms and hurried indoors with it as fast as he could. His first care when

he had set it on the table was to draw the curtain well across his shop window; for that is the worst of finding anything, everybody must know all about it before you know yourself. Then lighting a rush candle, he took a cloth, and carefully wiping away the encrusted dirt, strove to make out the inscription which he now found was cut or graven into the wood; but he could no more make it out than Shock could have done.

“Lingo again!” grumblingly murmured John. “Why can’t all the world speak plain English? But there, I doubt it means little enough. The inside’s the thing,” he added, turning the box about in search of the lock; but there was no such thing to be found, it was fastened entirely by nails which were beaten up to their heads into the iron bands, and so he took chisel and pincers and prised it open.

“What if it is a cheat after all, and full of emptiness!” thought John, as he worked away, “or worse still, of stones and suchlike rubbish?” But as the last nail yielded, and he lifted the lid, which was not hinged, but came entirely off, lo! what a sight met his gaze! There, brimful to the top, lay a heap of gold and

silver pieces, and as presently he ventured to turn these over, first one precious stone and then another gleamed through the shining heap. These he found, on looking closer, were studded into a large goblet seemingly of wrought gold, and a small casket of similar work, and underneath these lay more loose coins. "Gold pieces and shillings as I live!" gasped the delighted pedlar; but when he examined them closer, his face fell rather blankly, for the images on the money, if money it was, were strange to him. Instead of the Queen's sharp face all set round with her huge ruff and queer little crown perked right atop of her frizzy hair, these coins bore the likeness of a gentle beautiful man's face, and the graceful head was entirely encircled by a large crown. Such sort of a face John had seen on the painted windows of Westminster Abbey, and it was not unlike the one of the man in Swaffham church, tied to a tree and pierced with countless arrows, who Edward Coke had once told him was held to be Edmund the Martyr, shot to death by the arrows of the Danes.

On all the coins some inscription ran, and

John spelt out Henri-cus, which might, he thought, have something to do with Henry; but there were some figures, and A.D., which last, of course, he understood; but the rest was lingo, like the words on the box lid. "Heads or tails, 'tis all lingo," sighed John, when he had spent a good hour over the contents of the box; and he was just going to put on the lid again, when beneath all, spread flat out on the bottom of the box, something yellow-white gleamed through, which looked like paper or parchment. It was parchment, and bore the following in good plain old-fashioned English:—

"Being in fere of ye White Roses who are upon us, I Gengulphus, Prior of ye Convent of Castle Acre, doe here secrete this propertie, and doe bequeathe it to him whoe may bee ye finder thereof, beseeching him to use it in trust to ye glorie of God, and toe his own honourable and honest need."

"Prior Gengulphus!" in soft awe-stricken tones said John, as he replaced the parchment and the treasure as nearly as he found it, and closing the box he placed it under his pillow and went to bed. "I wish Master Edward

was here," he murmured anxiously as he fell asleep, wearied out with his hard work.

CHAPTER XIV

TOM BADSWORTH'S VISIT

JOHN PENNYCUICK, generally speaking, sang over his cobbling work, for he had a score of ballads in his head; but next morning he was silent and brooding. He would like to have gone out with his pack, but the box of treasure lay heavy on his mind, and he dared not leave it alone in the house; and so there he sat on his bench in front of the window, sewing away at an old buff riding boot, to all appearance as if he had not a thought beyond it, but in reality listening anxiously for the footsteps of the lads passing on their way to school.

He had got a very brilliant notion. It was this. At the grammar school the boys learned Latin and all sorts of what he called lingo; and he thought if he placed the lid of his treasure box in his shop window, they would stop to read it as they went by, and then he would

ask them what it meant. School time would not strike for half an hour, and John was plying his needle steadily enough, when suddenly a dark shadow fell across the window; and a low snarling growl from Shock, who lay curled up on a spot of sunshine near the open door, made him look up quickly, to look down again quicker still, for it was only Tom Badsworth peering in at the window, and the sight of Tom Badsworth lounging about the streets was more frequent than it was pleasing. As to bidding anyone a civil good-morrow, it was far too great trouble for Tom; and John therefore looked up in no small surprise when the young man, coming round, and leaning both arms on the closed lower half of the door, bade him good-morrow in honey-sweet tones.

"The same to you, Master Badsworth," said John, quieting Shock, who returned the greeting less politely.

"You've still got your dog, I see," said Tom.

"As you hear. Yes," answered John, stitching away.

"He's a nice dog. I always did admire him."

"I would do it at a safe distance," duly warned John. "He's got his different little ways with different people, and he never forgets."

Tom looked uneasy, though Shock, at his master's bidding, curled down again, and looked as fast asleep as a church mouse, leaving, however, the corner of one eye open. "What's that you've got in your window this morning?" asked Tom. "Something like a box lid, isn't it?"

"Ay," grunted John.

"How dampish it looks!"

"Small wonder. It's stood in a damp place."

"The box?"

"Maybe," said John, "though I don't know how you should know there is a box to it."

"Oh, come! what's a lid without one?" said Tom. "What was in the box—eh, you might as well tell us?"

John looked up keenly in Badsworth's sly little eyes. "What's on the box, is what I would like to know," he said.

"Latin."

"I thought as much."

"Why don't you ask me to translate it for you?" said Tom grandly.

"What's the good?"

"Do you think I wouldn't?"

"Oh! I don't go to supposing you're as bad as all that. It's because you can't, I mean."

"Do you take me for a fool?" said Tom with an evil look.

"I've only heard say how neatly the fool's cap used to fit you at school," said John.

"Some of your fine friend Master Coke's tell-tales, I'll dare swear, you got that from him," ragefully snarled Tom.

"Not he," laughed John; "I doubt I never heard your name pass his lips. He's something bet—else to think about. I warrant if he was here, I would know next moment the meaning of what's written on that lid."

"So clever, isn't he?" sneered Tom.

"Ay, he would make nothing of it."

"Do you think I can't?"

"That's about it, I doubt."

"The mischief take you!" shrieked Tom in a fury. "Think I can't read that stuff?"

"Stuff!"

"Rather. Why, what do you imagine it is?" and an odd gleam shot into Badsworth's pale eyes.

"I tell you I can't. I'm going to ask the lads."

"Take my advice; don't expose your ignorance," grinned Tom. "Look here, as if it wasn't clear as mud."

"Eh!" said John, expectantly watching Tom as he stretched his neck and glanced again at the lid.

"Listen now:—

'Pease pudding hot, pease pudding cold,
Pease pudding in the pot, nine days old!'

That's what it means;" and shrieking with laughter Tom Badsworth took to his heels before Shock could reach them, and disappeared round the corner of the street.

"Father shall know of this," muttered Tom, when he felt himself perfectly safe, "if it's only to punish the fellow for keeping such a savage beast of a dog. I couldn't rightly make it out, but I could read *treasure* on that lid plain as my eye, and *under*, and *lie*. I've heard folks say times again, the old monks did bury gold

and valuables there in one king's time, when there was civil war about; and Father meant to be overhauling the orchard, once he had got rid of John Pennycuick, I've heard him say so often. Marry! Now I know what the fellow was after, under the old apple tree last night; bringing my heart into my mouth, just as I had got my hand safe into the chink in the fowl-house roof, and making me smash the biggest egg I ever helped myself to yet. But I'll be even with him; Father shall know."

CHAPTER XV

A TIMELY ARRIVAL

MEANTIME John Pennycuick hastened to take the lid out of the window again, "just", as he argued to himself, "by way of precaution". Grammar-school boys, he began to think, were all very well in their way, but—well, he felt it behoved him to be careful, and for the meaning of the inscription he would ask the school-master himself. "Pease-pudding hot, quotha!" he said angrily. "I doubt 'twas as much as

pudding was invented when Prior Gengulphus lived. Rare sort of pease-pudding, truly; I warrant old Master Badsworth would have liked his slice of it; but it all belongs to Master Edward. Ay, ay, ay, if he were but here," sighed John. "If——"

"So, Master Runaway, I have you at last!" cried a voice that made John's heart leap, and the touch of a well-known hand was laid on his shoulder. "And you, Shock, you old villain, what did you both mean by it—making off from Gunpowder Alley as if some of it had got into your boots?"

"Business, Master Edward," said John in a strange quiver of content. "And what good wind brings you here?"

"Pleasure," said Coke, sitting on the edge of the table, at which John was looking at his lid.

"I'm glad of it," said John; "for you don't look like it; you're as white as the pear blossom in my orchard."

"And what about the apples, John?"

"I say again, I only wish you looked as well as they do," insisted John. "What ails you, Master Edward?"

"A terrible attack of homesickness, which was made worse by the sight of you, John; and I've come to Mileham to cure it."

"I'm heartily glad 'tis no more," said John.

"Well, seriously, I thought a spell of rest wouldn't hurt me; and, more seriously still, what sent you flying from London like that? No ill news, I trust?"

"Nay, 'joyful news'," answered John, with a shy smile, "that was told me on London Bridge."

Coke looked up. "And the news, is it a secret, John?" he asked.

"Ay, betwixt Shock and me—and you, Master Edward; for what is mine's yours, I trow."

"I don't understand," said Coke.

"'Twill be clearer to us all, when you've told me the English of this," said John, laying a finger on the box lid.

"That's soon told," said Coke, running his eye over the inscription. "It's like this:—

'Under me doth lie
Treasure greater than I'."

"You don't say so!" cried John. "Master

Edward, don't deceive me now. Don't be playing with a poor ignorant man like me," implored John.

"Heaven forbid I should do such a thing," said the young man. "That's the meaning, if I know Latin, John."

"And what are these?" said John, bringing out the box, and taking up in his hands a handful of coins.

"Money! The current coin of the realm in King Henry the Sixth's time. See, all bearing the stamp of his sad martyr's face."

"And these?"

"Nay, they look like chalices and cups belonging to some church. Ay, to be sure. See, here is the crest of my Lord de Warrenne engraved on the stem. Where did it all come from?"

"The old apple tree, Master Edward."

"But how?" began Coke. "It's wonderful——"

"Seeing's believing. First let's go and dig up the other," said John, turning up his sleeves, "and then I'll tell you all about it."

"Have with you then," said Coke, as

merrily as if he was a schoolboy once more, and away they went, Shock foremost.

CHAPTER XVI

JOHN'S LAST WILL

It was all quite true. There, some feet lower than the first box, lay a second, filled with treasure of far greater value than the first.

"You'll be the richest man in Norfolk, Master Edward," said John, when he had related the whole wondrous tale.

"Nay, it has nothing to do with me."

"'Tis found on your acres."

"Not so. The acre is yours. I gave it you."

"Nay, that you did not," bluntly said John.

"Didn't your own lips say the law wouldn't allow you to do it. Haven't I got it in thief—fief, I mean—and wasn't the best fruit of this old tree to be given over to you?"

"I doubt," said Coke, knitting his brows into an amused frown, "'tis a mighty pretty little point of law. Treasure trove, John,

that's what it is. And what with one thing and another, 'tis not to be said out of hand to whom it belongs."

"There's one thing certain," said John—"whose it isn't."

"Eh?"

"Master Badsworth."

"Why, that's plain, to be sure. And another point's pretty clear, I think," said Coke, taking up the parchment and reading it through again. "Here, in black and white, stands written: *I, Gengulphus, bequeath this treasure to the finder.* That is you, John Pennycuick, you were the finder."

"Ay, of the first boxful, to be sure I was," said John; "to use in trust. For the second, your spade struck it first, Master Edward."

"But in that, was no note. Treasure trove belongs to the owner."

"The dead want not gold and silver," said John.

"And he, being dead, to his children," said Coke half to himself. "But Gengulphus was a monk, and had no heirs."

"Why truly, no man had more," cried

John. "All who were poor, or sick, or in trouble, were his children; and no man ever went empty away from Castle Acre Priory doors. So the good father put to use the wealth God lent him."

And so, for all he was no monk, but just a humble pedlar, John Pennycuick used the treasure trove that fell to his share. It was not all he found, for the law of treasure thus come upon, is a curious and interesting one, but the bulk of it was given over to him and to his heirs for ever.

Now, John was a lonely childless man, with not a relation in the world; but one living thing was dear to him beyond all words, and that was Shock. And one man, his friend and benefactor, Edward Coke, understood something of John's love for the faithful creature. And when at last John and Shock, having lived each their span of years, died, they were not divided, for John Pennycuick left a curious will, by which he left all he possessed to the poor of the parish of Swaffham, and for the beautifying and repairing of Swaffham church — provided, that he and Shock should be laid side by side in

Swaffham churchyard, as side by side they had lived their earthly life.

Edward Coke, the lad who had once done Shock such a kind turn, became in time Lord Chief Justice of England; and he took care to see his old friend's dearest wish carried out. Nor did he stop at that, for remembering the chat they had that day when they walked by Spring Garden to Charing Cross, Coke caused a carving to be made almost as large as life, representing John tramping along, pack on back, with Shock at his heels; and there, in Swaffham church, you may see it to this day. And for many a year too, the same was also to be seen painted on the alehouse windows of his native place.

Master Badsworth, of course, fell into a great fury, when he thought of what he had lost in parting with the precious Acre. Nobody was sorry for his misfortune. But worse luck was still in store for him; for in course of time, Edward Coke was able to prove that the sum he had demanded for giving up the Acre was an unjust claim, as John Pennycuick had always said it was, and Badsworth was forced to refund it.

Of young Tom it is enough to say he came to no good.

Master Algernon Francis Trevelyan Badger was no loser by the joyful news he gave to the strange country fellow on London Bridge. One morning, not very long after that event, he received the gift of fifty pounds from "an old friend in the country", bearing on the wrapper a written recommendation not to forget that, "if gentlemen must dress, tailors must live".

And being no bad fellow at heart, he took the hint, and honestly paid his debts with the gift.

Long years after John and Shock were laid to their rest, Sir Edward Coke met the fulfilment of his dream, and fell down, down from his high estate. But his fate was not that which many a man, clever and great as he, has met. He did not die upon the scaffold, though he ran some danger of it, but was permitted to retire to his estates, and was buried in Mileham church, where you may see the great lawyer's tomb.

And when, at last, weary and old with service, his failing eyes gazed over his broad

fair lands of Mileham and Castle Acre, there came through the memory many regretful and tender thoughts, which most long lives must bring — the gentle spotless memory of John Pennycuick

“THE PEDLAR AND HIS DOG”.

